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No 16

DICK HAZEL, EXPLORER
or Lost in the
African Jungle



BY CORNELIUS SHEA

In an exceedingly short space of time the boys and Sailor Jack were safely in the little craft, and Chris at once pushed off from the side of the burning vessel.

BRAVE & BOLD

A Different Complete Story Every Week

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DICK HAZEL, EXPLORER;

OR,

Lost in the African Jungle.

BY CORNELIUS SHEA.

CHAPTER I

THE PLOT.

Late one night in the month of October, in the year 18—, two men were seated in an elegantly-furnished room in an uptown mansion in New York, engaged in earnest conversation.

One was a tall, broad-shouldered, fine-looking man, with a dark-brown mustache, slightly tinged with gray. He had a remarkably fine appearance, but a close observer might have detected a steely glitter in his eyes, which gave him a half-sinister look.

His companion was a trifle below the medium size, and his junior by at least a dozen years. He wore a suit of the latest style, and had the decided appearance of a fast gentleman of the period.

His face was very red and covered with blotches, which showed, to an ordinary observer, that he was a drinking man; not a casual drinker, but one who kept himself under the influence of liquor all the time, and never appeared to be drunk.

Had a person been seeking for a man to do some unlawful work for him, a dozen words of conversation with this man, and he would have been convinced that he need look no further.

Even now he was engaging himself to do some unlawful act for his companion

"Bill Holcombe," said his companion, rising to his feet, "you have heard my proposition. Now, what do you say? Will you do it? Remember, it will make us both rich."

"It's a ticklish piece of business, John Holton, and you know

it," replied Holcombe; "but I suppose the reward is worth the risk. Yes—I'll do it."

"Shake hands on it, then."

The two men grasped each other heartily by the hand. Then the one addressed as John Holton again spoke.

"Do you thoroughly understand what you have got to do now?"

"Yes, I guess I do. You said the boy hung out a great deal about the wharves?"

"Yes; he seems to have a sort of mania for ships. His father was a sea captain, you know."

"What did you say the boy's name was? I don't want to forget."

"Dick Hazel; and a sharp sort of a chap he is, too. You will have to look out for him, for he is a born athlete, and is as strong as a young lion."

"Pshaw! How old is he?"

"Seventeen."

"Ha! ha! The idea of a boy of seventeen getting the best of Bill Holcombe. Why, John, I thought you knew me better than that!"

"I know you are a bad man to tackle; but I am telling you to look out for the boy, that's all."

"Or he may down me, eh?"

"He may."

"Well, I'll run the risk. You may rest assured that by to-morrow night this time he will be out of sight of New York forever!"

"What sort of a ship are you going to put him aboard?"

"No matter; I'll fix that. All that you care is that he never comes back, isn't it?"

"Yes; for it would be deuced unpleasant if he was to turn up at some unexpected time. Why, do you know what would happen then?" and John Holton's voice sank to a whisper.

Holcombe shrugged his shoulders.

"I think I do," he said.

"Well, I'll tell you. Unless we both made ourselves mighty scarce, we would be apt to spend a few of our remaining years in a place called Sing Sing."

At the mention of that famous resort up the Hudson, Holcombe shifted his feet uneasily.

"But it ain't going to happen," said he. "He will never come back, I tell you; for I'll see to it that he is lost overboard in a storm in midocean!"

"Good enough! Attend to your duty faithfully, and we will both be rich men."

"What is the boy's property valued at, anyway, John?"

"An estate worth a hundred and forty thousand, and about a hundred thousand in hard cash."

"Phew! That won't be so bad to take, will it?" and the villain helped himself to a drink from a bottle, which stood on the table.

"I should say not," said Holton, following his example. "But in order to get it, I must have positive proof that the boy is dead."

"You'll have the proofs, never fear."

"I hope so!"

"I say, John, don't you feel a little bit squeamish about getting away with your own nephew?"

"No; not when I think of the money. You know that I'm not one of the chicken-hearted kind, either. And, besides, he is only my wife's sister's child. What is he to me? I have been acting as guardian for him for the last fifteen years. His parents are dead, and my wife is the next heir, which is just as good as if I was, myself. Now let us take another drink before we part for the night; and the next time we meet I hope you will bring me good news."

"That I will, John, never fear," and swallowing his liquor at a gulp, Bill Holcombe proceeded to button his coat about the chin, and donning his high silk hat, was ready to go.

Holton at once showed him to the door, and after bidding each other "good-night!" the two villains parted.

It must have been considerable after midnight, and a slight, drizzling rain was falling, while the chill October wind blew in fitful gusts.

Holcombe shivered.

It was a nasty night to be out, but he had a duty to perform, and he meant to do it.

Raising his umbrella, he started rapidly down the street, which appeared to be entirely deserted.

He had not proceeded far when he beheld a solitary cab coming in his direction.

When it had arrived opposite to him, Holcombe called out:

"Hello, cabby! want a fare?"

"Whoa! Where do yer want to go to, boss?"

"Downtown."

"How fur?"

"As far as Cherry Street."

"What'll yer give, boss?"

"Five dollars."

"Git in, boss!"

Holcombe obeyed, and the door was slammed shut, and the next moment he was being rapidly driven downtown.

Holcombe sat in silence and listened to the rain, as it dashed against the windows of the cab, as he was being whirled along.

"You're here, boss!"

Holcombe said nothing, but paying the man, he cast a glance around him to find out where he was, and then hurried off down Cherry Street.

A block or two was traversed, when he came to a dingy saloon, from which came the sounds of ribald merriment.

Without the least particle of hesitation, he opened the door and entered.

A motley crowd of sailors were inside and a one-eyed man presided at the bar.

Holcombe stepped up to the bar, and ordering a drink, opened conversation with the bartender.

"Has Captain Marlowe been in to-night?" he asked.

"Yes," was the reply, "he's in the back room now."

The villainous plotter at once stepped into the back room, and when he emerged an hour later his face bore a confident smile.

CHAPTER II.

DICK HAZEL.

"Leave that man alone!"

"Ho! ho! the Dutchman's got a champion. Give it to him ag'in, an' let's see what he'll do."

"You leave him alone, I tell you! I've been watching you for the last five minutes, and it has gone just about far enough!"

The scene was on one of the South Street docks, and the words "Leave that man alone!" were uttered in a clear, ringing tone by a handsome, well-built youth of seventeen.

A German lad of perhaps nineteen or twenty, attired in seafaring costume, and loaded with a bag filled with some heavy articles, by the manner in which he carried it, was making his way along the dock, evidently with the intention of boarding a vessel which lay close at hand.

He was a green-looking fellow, indeed, and a crowd of street lads, ranging from twelve years to twenty, were following at his heels, jeering him and pelting him with decayed vegetables, etc.

There were tears in the German's eyes, and he was struggling frantically to elude his tormentors and carry his load safe on board his ship.

Finally a big, burly ruffian tripped him up, and he fell sprawling upon the dock, with his bag on top of him.

It was then that the youth had called upon them to desist, and his flashing eyes and manly appearance awed the poor German's tormentors for a moment.

"Do you think it has gone fur enough, hey?" said the one who had tripped the German, turning and facing the youth.

"That is just exactly what I said," was the reply, in a cool tone.

"I'd like to know how you would stop us from foolin' with the Dutchman. What would you do, anyway, if I was to hit him an' smash his 'beak' for him?"

"Don't you try it, that's all."

"I won't, hey? Well, now, you jest see if I won't, and then if you say much I'll give you the same. Understand?"

The speaker thrust his dirty face close to the party he was addressing as he uttered the words.

But the boy did not seem to notice him, but started at once to help the German to his feet.

Seeing this, the bully made a rush, and drawing back his arm, struck the object of his ridicule a blow in the face, sending him flat upon the dock again.

The next instant something happened which surprised the fellow as much, probably, as he had ever been in his whole life.

Spat!

A clinched fist struck him squarely between the eyes, and he measured his full length upon the dock, a thousand stars dancing before his eyes.

"Hey, hey!" shouted the crowd of boys, "a fight, a fight!"

The bully was upon his feet in a moment, and uttering a frightful oath, he made a rush at his antagonist with the intention of annihilating him on the spot.

But he had "barked up the wrong tree," as the saying goes, for that well-trained arm again suddenly straightened out, and he repeated his former performance.

"Wot's ther matter, Bill? Git up an' give it ter him!" yelled his companions.

Bill possessed a considerable amount of grit, and encouraged by his friends, arose to his feet and again rushed at the German's champion.

This time he succeeded in clinching with him, and then began a wrestling match for the supremacy.

Back and forth they swayed, neither gaining any particular advantage, until suddenly the bully's foot slipped, and the next instant he went flying backward, and, failing to retain his equilibrium, toppled over the stringpiece into the river.

There was a wild shout at this, and coolly brushing his coat off, the plucky boy walked over to where the German, who had risen to his feet, was, and remarked:

"That's the way to fix 'em, Dutchy, when they don't know what's good for them."

"Py shiminy gracious! but you vos a goot von!" was the reply.

"I like to see fair play, Dutchy; but what is your name?"

"My name vos Hans Strauss."

"All right, Hans; mine is Dick Hazel. Now take hold, and I'll give you a lift with your luggage."

The German obeyed, and seizing the bag, the two made their way along the dock, leaving the crowd of boys to fish their defeated leader from the river.

"What is the name of your ship, Hans?" asked Dick Hazel, as the two walked along.

"Her name vos der *Becky A. Malvern*, Mister Dick Hazel."

"Don't 'mister' me, do you understand? Call me 'Dick;' I like it better."

"All right, Dick; you vos mine friend, und I von't forgid it, neider. No! by shiminy, I von't."

"All right, Hans. Here is your ship, I guess. So long! I hope you will have a pleasant voyage. Maybe we will meet again, some time."

"Good-pye, Dick; I hopes me dot we vill!"

So saying, the German stepped on board, and our hero, Dick Hazel, made his way slowly back in the direction of the street.

"I almost wish I was going somewhere on a voyage myself," he muttered, as he walked along. "I am getting tired of this kind of living, and no mistake!"

Notwithstanding the fact that our hero was the heir to a fortune, he was not happy with his surroundings.

His mother had died when he was quite young, and his father, a wealthy sea captain, had been lost at sea, some few years previous to the opening of our story.

Dick's uncle, John Holton, had been appointed as executor of the property until he should become of age, and it was with him that our hero resided.

In spite of the comforts of a finely-furnished home, there was a marked coolness about his uncle and aunt which the boy did not like.

He was allowed to do pretty much as he pleased, and was treated with a certain kind of respect—but that was all.

Of late he had felt a yearning for the sea, and he was an almost daily visitor at the docks, viewing the shipping and conversing with different seamen, when the opportunity afforded.

He longed to follow in the footsteps of his father, and become the captain of a large ship.

Dick had come down to the docks on this fine October afternoon, feeling more lonely than ever.

As he walked back along the dock he saw that the street lads had effected the rescue of the bully, and had taken their departure.

Presently Dick observed a sea-faring man coming toward him from the street, who, he judged, must be the captain of one of the neighboring vessels.

As he came up to our hero he eyed him keenly for a moment, and then stopped in front of him.

"Hello, lad!" said he, in a cheery voice; "which way are ye bound?"

"Nowhere in particular, captain," replied Dick.

"Well, then, why not go on board with me and see us get ready for sea?"

"Which ship is yours, captain?" asked our hero, his face brightening up at the prospect of having such an opportunity.

"That bark over there—the *Becky A. Malvern*."

Dick started. That was the vessel Hans was on board.

"Yes, captain; I'll be glad to go. When do you sail?"

"In about half an hour. I say, lad, what is your name?"

"Dick Hazel, sir."

"Good enough! Come on, now, and we'll go on board."

He spoke in such a strange manner when he said this, that our hero did not quite understand him, but he followed on, nevertheless.

In a minute or two they arrived at the vessel's side, and Dick followed the captain on board.

"Come on, lad, and I'll show you the cabin of the *Malvern*."

Down the companionway went our hero, and entered the cabin, which was a neat and tasty one, to say the least.

"Well, lad, how do you like it?"

Dick turned to make a reply, when suddenly a handkerchief was pressed over his nose and mouth, and he was forced over backward.

He felt his senses leaving him and struggled violently; but soon all was a blank, and he sank unconscious in the captain's arms.

He was trapped.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIGHT ON THE YARD-ARM.

When Dick Hazel returned to consciousness he found that his clothes had been removed, and he was lying in a berth.

There was a dull, roaring sound in his ears, and he felt a rocking sensation.

It was some few minutes before he realized where he was, and then it all came gradually to him.

That he was still in the cabin of the *Becky A. Malvern*, he felt certain; for there were the same neat and tasty surroundings he had observed on entering.

"What does this mean, anyhow?" he asked himself, as he rubbed his eyes. "The ship is at sea, I am sure. What motive could the captain have had to abduct me in this manner? It is very strange; I guess I will try and investigate a bit."

He at once sprang from the berth; as he did so, he became acquainted with the fact that it must be night, for a lamp was swinging from the center of the ceiling, shedding forth a dim light.

The light from the swinging lamp showed him his clothes lying on a locker, close at hand, and he at once proceeded to don them.

When this feat had been successfully accomplished, he made his way to the door of the cabin.

It was unlocked, and yielded at his touch.

"Now to find out what this all means," he muttered, as he ascended the companionway.

Dick saw the figure of a man, whom he rightly conjectured to be the captain, standing upon the deck, a few feet distant, smoking a cigar.

Advancing boldly up to him, he said:

"Captain, what means this outrage? Why am I taken forcibly out to sea, after being drugged in the cabin?"

"Belay there, you lubber!" savagely exclaimed the skipper, in a rough tone, as he turned abruptly around at the question; "get to the forecabin with you at once; that's to be your quarters hereafter. And don't you ask any more questions, for Captain Phil Marlowe allows no one to question him aboard ship. Now get along with you, and remember that. Lively, now!"

"But, captain," began Dick; "I—"

"Now, get on with you!" he repeated, "or I'll flog you within an inch of your life."

Dick's blood boiled at the treatment, but thinking discretion the better part of valor, he obeyed.

Making his way along the deck, he soon came to the forecabin, and he at once entered it.

The inmates eyed him with surprise.

"Whar did you drop from, younker?" asked an old salt.

"From New York, of course," replied Dick; "but I came against my will, though."

"Hum! pressed into sarvice, hey? Well, lad, you'll hev ter make ther best of it, for we is bound for Afriky on this trip, we are. You hed better turn in, in that empty bunk over there, an' kinder git used ter it."

The boy still felt dizzy from the effects of the drug he had received, and he determined to follow the old sailor's advice.

"All right," said he in reply, "I'll do as you say, I guess."

Nothing more being said, he crawled in the bunk with his clothes on.

Dick lay awake for a long while, thinking over the situation.

"I can't see for what purpose I have been kidnaped," he thought, "unless my uncle— But pshaw! he would not be as bad as that! At any rate, I am here on board a ship bound for Africa, and I guess I will do as the old sailor says and make the best of it. It is an exciting life, anyhow, and I always thought I'd like it."

Thus the boy reasoned until at last he fell asleep.

Three weeks passed by. Dick had now become accustomed to his duties, and could climb the ratlines almost as fast as any of the crew.

Hans, the German, had been overjoyed at meeting our hero on board, and when he had told the story of Dick licking the bully on the dock, nearly all hands expressed their admiration.

We say nearly all, but we might as well say all but one, and this exception was a scowling, loosely built fellow of perhaps twenty-two years of age, named Bob Armstrong.

He appeared to have taken a dislike to our hero from the first, and he was not adverse to showing it.

He had on one occasion attempted to pick a quarrel with Dick, when a young fellow, whose name was Chris Larsen, interfered.

Chris, as his name would suggest, was a Swede. He had come to this country when very young, and, consequently, could speak English as well as the best of us.

He was not more than nineteen, but there was not a man on board the entire ship who was as strong and powerful as he.

He was just the kind of a fellow to have for a friend, and Dick felt more easy in his mind when he gained the friendship of Chris.

"You must look out for that fellow, Bob Armstrong," said Chris, "for I have been watching him lately, and think he means to harm you in some way. I saw him and Captain Marlowe in earnest conversation yesterday, and I heard your name mentioned. You must look out, I repeat, for it is my belief that they will knock you overboard when they get the chance. What other purpose could the captain have had in getting you aboard? I'm sure it was not for the want of men. No, you can depend upon it that there is something in the wind, and that he has been hired to do this business."

"I begin to think so myself," replied Dick; "but I can scarcely bring myself to think that my uncle is such a villain as that. Well, even if it is so, I'll beat them at their own game, for I'll keep my weather eye skinned, as old Jack says, and look out for squalls."

One day, when the *Becky A. Malvern* had traversed perhaps two-thirds of the distance to the African coast, a terrible squall sprang up, which terminated into a raging storm.

At the first signs of it, the seamen were ordered aloft to take in all sail, and Dick Hazel, in the course of his duty, went with them.

He was one of the foremost to reach the ratlines, and he found, as is often the case, that he had some one to give him a race to the crosstrees.

Dick noticed, with a slight feeling of uneasiness, that his rival was no other than Bob Armstrong; but this did not deter him in the least in the endeavor to beat him aloft.

Up, up they ran, as nimble as cats, neither gaining any advantage over the other, the rising wind whistling through the cordage, and causing the sails to flap wildly.

Dick was the first to reach the yard-arm, and he had already commenced to furl in the sail, when Armstrong arrived at his side, his face pale with fury at being beaten by a landsman.

"Putty smart for a boy, ain't yer?" he hissed, as he gave a tug at the sail, nearly causing Dick to lose his hold and topple overboard. "You don't want ter be too smart aboard this craft, I kin tell yer, for if you are, you'll suffer for it, maybe. Why ther deuce don't yer move lively? Don't yer see that the squall is upon us?"

Armstrong was right when he said the squall was upon them, and by the time the sail was safely furled the ship was rocking furiously.

Dick had made no reply to the words, but had kept on working with a will, and this somewhat nettled Armstrong, who, it was evident, was bent upon picking a quarrel.

Suddenly he leaned forward and gave Dick a push, nearly causing him to lose his hold upon the yard-arm.

There was such a devilish expression in the villain's eyes as he did so that Dick shuddered involuntarily.

He felt that Armstrong meant to murder him then and there.

"What do you mean?" gasped Dick. "Do you want to shove me off the yard-arm?"

"I'll show you what I mean," hissed the villain, suddenly drawing his sheath-knife. "You hev got ter die!"

Dick felt that Armstrong meant what he said, and he knew full well that it would be useless to cry for help, as his words would not have been heard ten feet away, owing to the roaring of the elements.

Acting on a sudden impulse, he grasped the villain by the wrist, as he held the gleaming knife aloft.

Then began a terrible struggle many feet above the deck, the lightning playing about the combatants, and the rain descending in bucketfuls.

Boy that he was, Dick was a match for Armstrong, as far as strength went, and he at last succeeded in making him drop the knife.

Back and forth they swayed, when suddenly the ship gave a heavy lurch; the foot-rope snapped asunder, and, losing their hold, the two combatants plunged headlong downward.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHIP ON FIRE.

When the mate had shouted the cry for "all hands to take in sail," Chris Larsen had glanced hastily about to see where Dick Hazel was, but in the confusion which followed failed to perceive him, as he made his way hurriedly aloft, in company of Bob Armstrong.

Duty called his attention now, and for the time he forgot all about him.

But when he had returned to the deck, he was astonished to see a sailor's knife suddenly drop from aloft, and fall within a few feet of him, rattling up the deck.

The squall was raging in all its fury now, and clutching the vessel's shroud for support, he raised his eyes aloft.

It was then that he perceived what was going on up there; Dick was engaged in a battle for life with his foe.

The yard-arm, which the two were upon, was swaying at a terrible rate, and Chris saw that both were in danger of falling, either in the raging sea, or upon the ship's deck, to be dashed to pieces.

This conviction had no sooner forced itself upon his mind, than he saw the foot-rope snap, and the next instant Dick and his antagonist came whirling toward the deck.

Chris involuntarily closed his eyes and shuddered. The thought even of the sickening thud to follow was horrible.

But it did not come.

Raising his eyes, he once more looked up.

The fall of the two combatants had been checked.

Dick's leg in some manner had become entangled in a part of the rigging, and there he hung in midair, still clutching Armstrong, who was struggling wildly at the thought of his peril.

"My God!" ejaculated Chris, hastily starting up the ratlines. "Both of them will be killed!"

He saw that even now the rope entangled about Dick's leg was beginning to slip.

In an incredibly short space of time he was at a point opposite the swinging combatants, waiting for an opportunity to catch them, as they swung toward him.

Suddenly the ship gave a violent lurch, and just as the rope gave way he succeeded in catching Dick by the arm.

Both grasped the shrouds with a death-grip, and a sigh of relief escaped Chris' lips.

They were saved from what seemed to be certain death.

As soon as he had righted himself, Armstrong descended to the deck, without uttering a word of thanks to his preserver.

"Thanks, brave Chris! You were just in time," gasped Dick, when he had regained his breath; "I came near going that time; but you saved me."

"Don't say another word, Dick; wait until we get upon deck, and then tell me all about it."

Some of the seamen had witnessed the latter part of the performance, and they crowded around as Dick and Chris stepped upon the deck.

Captain Marlowe had gone below, and the mate was in charge. He, too, hurried forward, and exclaimed:

"Go below, Hazel! I shall report you and Armstrong to the skipper."

But, whether the mate spoke to the captain or not, nothing was heard from him in regard to the affair, and things went on just the same as though nothing had happened.

Several days passed by. The equator was crossed, and soon the *Becky A. Malvern* struck the South Atlantic current.

Captain Marlowe reckoned that in three or four days, at the most, they ought to come in sight of land.

The *Malvern* was a trading ship, loaded with all sorts of merchandise and trinkets—guns, knives, ammunition, etc.—to do business with the natives, taking in exchange for these the products of Southern Africa, so essential to our use.

The weather had been fine since the storm in which Dick had so nearly lost his life, and the ship had made excellent progress.

But even now the skipper finds that another of those squalls which are so common in this section is coming up, and he at once orders the necessary precautions to be taken.

It was nearly nightfall when the squall broke, and it promised to be a "smart" one, indeed.

The gale was blowing furiously, but as yet little or no rain had fallen.

Suddenly, in the very midst of it, smoke was discovered issuing from the forward hatch.

In an instant the utmost confusion prevailed, and efforts were at once made to find the fire and extinguish it.

Investigation showed that a bale of cotton merchandise had taken fire, in some manner unknown, and this, making rapid headway, had ignited all the inflammable material surrounding it.

As the hatch cover was thrown open, it was discovered that the entire forward hold was in a blaze.

The rush of air caused by the removal of the hatch cover caused it to increase in fury, and the captain's countenance paled as he saw the true state of affairs.

"All hands to the pumps to put out the fire!" he roared through his speaking trumpet.

The cry was plainly heard above the roaring of the wind, and the sailors hastened to obey.

Meanwhile the smoke and flames continued to pour from the hold in spite of all that was being done to quench the fire.

The violence of the gale called the attention of nearly half the crew to keep the ship righted, and the rest were using their utmost endeavors to keep the flames under subjection.

But in spite of their efforts the fire made rapid headway, and soon all hands saw that it was useless to try and save the ship.

The sailors on board the *Becky A. Malvern* were nearly to a man ignorant and superstitious, and as soon as they saw that it was useless to try and curb the rapidly gaining flames, a panic seized them.

"See," said Chris, turning to Dick, "they are rushing for the boats."

"You are right," replied our hero, as a fresh burst of flame disclosed the sailors running in every direction, gathering up what few things they hoped to save, and making for the boats.

In vain did Captain Marlowe endeavor to keep them in order. He might just as well have called upon the wind to cease blowing, or the fire to stop burning.

Suddenly the fire broke through the deck in another spot, and soon the flames began to shoot up the rigging, twisting about and hissing like so many fiery serpents.

The last hope of saving the ship now left the captain, and,

altering his manner, he proceeded to superintend the loading of the boats.

Our three young friends made their way hurriedly to the forecabin to obtain the little clothing they had on board, when they discovered an old salt known as Sailor Jack lying very ill in his bunk.

"Come, Jack!" shouted Dick; "up and out of this; the ship is on fire!"

But Sailor Jack did not heed him; he was suffering with some sort of fever, and was out of his mind.

"We must get him out of here," exclaimed Chris, "and we must hurry, too, I reckon; it's getting deucedly hot here."

He was right; even then the smoke began pouring in from the hold in a dense cloud, which, for a few moments, completely blinded them.

It took our three friends several minutes to convey the sick sailor from his bunk to the deck, and when they succeeded in doing so, they saw that not a moment was to be lost.

The smoke was now so thick that they could not see two yards ahead of them, and they staggered blindly along to where the boats were being loaded, carrying their burden with them.

Presently a puff of wind wafted the smoke aside for an instant, and they were astonished and horrified to find that the two boats, which had been loading but a few minutes before, were gone.

To all appearances they were the only ones on board the doomed ship.

"My God!" gasped Dick, "they have gone and left us!"

"Don't give up yet," replied Chris, hoarsely. "There is another boat left—we will take that. Follow me—be quick!"

His two companions obeyed, carrying Sailor Jack with them. The heat was now nearly unbearable; the flames fairly singed the hair from the boys' heads.

Suddenly Chris cried out:

"Here is the boat—already lowered for us. Now over you go; hurry up!"

In an exceedingly short space of time the boys and Sailor Jack were safely in the little craft, and Chris at once pushed off from the side of the burning *Becky A. Malvern*.

Seizing the oars, which were lying in the bottom of the boat, Dick and Chris began pulling away with all their might.

The burning ship made a grand spectacle, and when they had rowed a few minutes the two boys rested on their oars and gazed at it in silence.

Suddenly Hans started to his feet with a spring that nearly threw him overboard, and exclaimed:

"Mine chimney gracious! What have ye here in dot boat?"

Even as he spoke the form of a man arose to a reclining position from the bottom of the boat, and stared blankly at the three.

Dick Hazel started.

It was no other than Bob Armstrong who was in the boat with them.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE AFRICAN WILDS.

In order to explain how it came to be that Bob Armstrong was in the boat, we must go back to the time when it was discovered that the *Becky A. Malvern* was on fire.

Armstrong possessed a very selfish nature, and he always made it a point to look out for himself first every time.

As soon as he found out that the ship was in danger of being burned to the water's edge, he began to think of some means by which he might save his life.

He thought of one of the boats, and in the confusion which followed, he began loading in with provisions, fire-arms, and everything he could think of.

Armstrong knew that they were not very far from the coast of Africa, and in case the ship was doomed, he hoped to reach it.

When Armstrong saw the sailors rushing for the other boats, he thought it about time he, too, should leave.

He had already contrived to lower the boat he had chosen for his own use, and making his way through the dense smoke, he unfastened her painter and started to lower himself over the side.

In doing so, his foot slipped in some manner, and he fell headlong into the boat, the fall stunning him.

When he came to his senses again, he found that he was not the only occupant of the boat, and scowled savagely as he saw Dick.

"How came you here?" asked Dick, as Armstrong arose to a sitting posture.

"I don't know as that is any business of yours!" was the reply, in a surly tone. "I might better ask you fellows that question."

"Oh, that is easily answered, on our part," replied Chris; "we got left behind by the other boats, so we took this one—that's all."

"Well, that's just about my fix, exactly, I reckon," said Armstrong, in a more pleasant tone. "Only I slipped and fell when I was getting in the boat, and lost consciousness."

Dick was a little uneasy in regard to Bob Armstrong; he would much rather he had gone in one of the other boats. He determined to keep a sharp watch on the fellow."

"Armstrong," said Dick, "I see you had the forethought to stock up pretty well before you started to leave, which is a lucky thing for us. Did you bring a compass?"

"Yes; you'll find it under the stern-sheets back there."

"Good! We are not so bad off, after all."

"We might be a great deal worse off," said Chris. "Get out the compass, and let's lay our course for the nearest land."

This was at once done, and, there being a small mast and sail in the boat, it was at once put up. Soon they were scudding along before a brisk wind in the direction of the African coast.

There were half a dozen good Winchester repeating rifles and about a dozen heavy navy revolvers, besides some sheath-knives, among Armstrong's supplies.

There was plenty of ammunition, and this was divided up in equal parts, not forgetting Sailor Jack's part, for the old salt's fever had gone down somewhat, and he appeared to be fast recovering.

Both Dick and Chris were glad of this, for they naturally looked to such a man as he for advice.

Meanwhile, the wind continued favorable, and the little boat made good headway.

On the morning of the third day after the *Becky A. Malvern* had been destroyed by fire, Dick, whose eyesight appeared to be sharper than the rest, declared that he saw land.

"You are about right, my hearty," said Sailor Jack, who was now able to do his share of the work.

All hands looked anxiously, and when half an hour had passed they detected a faint blue line far away to the eastward.

"That is the coast of Africa, as sure as you live!" exclaimed Chris. "At the rate we are now going, we will be able to fetch it in about three hours. See if we don't."

He was right nearly to the minute; nearer and nearer they approached, and presently they managed to make a landing on a hard, sandy beach, which ran up to a dense forest.

The sun was scorching hot, and all hands at once sought the

shade of some broad-leaved trees, which reared themselves up with majestic splendor close at hand.

"As we have landed here in this wild country," said Armstrong, "don't you think we ought to select a leader from some of us, to sorter take charge, you know?"

"I don't know but that would be a good idea," replied Chris. "Who would you suggest, Armstrong?"

"How would I do? You must admit that I possess pretty fair judgment."

"That may be all right, too, but I don't think you would do."

"Why not?"

"You ought to know why not. Didn't you attempt to kill Dick on board the *Malvern*? And ain't you dead against us in your heart? You know you are; and then you have the nerve to ask why you wouldn't do for leader of this party. Wonders will never cease."

"Oh, well," sneered Armstrong, "if you want to keep up the old grudge, I am satisfied. Who would you suggest—Hazel, I suppose?"

"You have hit it exactly," retorted Chris; "that's just who I was going to suggest."

"Me?" asked Dick, in surprise.

"Yes, you."

"Ay, ay!" put in Sailor Jack.

"So say I!" exclaimed Hans. "Dick is de poy, and don't you forget me dot, by chimney!"

"Ay, ay!" again put in the old salt.

"All right," said Armstrong; "if all the rest are satisfied, I suppose I have got to be. Let it go at that."

In vain did Dick protest—they were bound that he should be leader, and so there was nothing else for him to do but to accept.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MISSIONARY AND HIS FAMILY.

A terrible hot day in the southwestern part of Africa, in the district known as Damara Land. It is yet early in the morning, but the burning rays of the sun shine with such a fierceness as to make it almost impossible to breathe.

A lumbering, yellow-topped wagon, drawn by a yoke of oxen, was slowly making its way across a sandy tract. About fifteen or sixteen natives accompanied it on foot, while inside the wagon were four white people—two men, a pleasant-faced woman and a handsome, queenly-looking girl of the blonde type.

The four constituted the family of the Reverend John Linderman Dailey, who was moving, with his household effects, from a place called Barmen to a small white settlement on the Nourse River.

In his younger days, John Linderman Dailey had been what is known as an out-and-out politician, but, becoming disgusted with the tricks and trades of a political life, he had emigrated to Africa, determined to spend the balance of his life as a missionary in enlightening the minds of the ignorant natives and in teaching them to make ready for the great Unknown after death.

This had been his great ambition, and during the nine years he had spent in Africa he had been very successful.

Financially, he was comfortably circumstanced, and so he made out well enough.

His family consisted of his wife, his daughter, Adele, and the hired man, Hiram Boff.

Adele Dailey was about sixteen years of age, and she appeared perfectly contented with the mode of life her father chose to lead.

"Father, is not that timber yonder?" asked the pretty Adele, in a rich, musical voice, as she glanced out of the front of the wagon.

"Yes, daughter," answered the reverend gentleman. "We will soon reach the shade of some giant trees and get out of the sun's hot rays."

"I am so glad!"

"So am I, Adele," said her mother. "This journey has been a wearisome one, indeed."

"I'll be gosh darned if it ain't!" exclaimed Hiram Boff, in a drawling tone.

Hiram was a genuine Yankee, and, in spite of Mr. Dailey's protestations, he was bound to use Yankee ejaculations.

"I don't like that air pesky cuss of a Jobo," said Hiram Boff to Mr. Dailey. "Ther rascal means mischief, see if he don't. Now, you just want to keep your eyes skinned, an' keep them air guns handy. I'll be gosh dinged if I ain't right!"

"Maybe you are, Hiram—maybe you are; at any rate, I'll follow your advice and keep on the watch. We can't tell who to trust in these days."

"Darned if you ain't right, dominie."

Jobo was an excellent guide, to say the least of him; he certainly had an eye for the best places to get through.

Thus they went on, making their way slowly but surely in the direction of their destination until night came on.

A suitable spot in a little glade was selected, and a huge fire was built to keep the wild beasts of the forest away.

The first hours of the night passed.

Jobo, the native guide, slipped away, unperceived, in the darkness.

When he returned, he saw that all hands were asleep, save a couple of the natives and Hiram Boff, who were on guard.

The fire still burned brightly.

Twelve o'clock at last came, and, yawningly, Hiram Boff started to awaken Dailey to take his turn at keep watch.

Suddenly something struck him on the side of the head, and, giving a quick gasp, he fell in a heap to the ground, unconscious.

The next moment a loud, savage yell rang out, and a horde of dusky Damarians rushed upon the scene, brandishing their war clubs and springing nimbly about in the firelight.

The Reverend J. L. Dailey awoke with a start, and, grasping his rifle, sprang to his feet.

Before he could comprehend the situation, he was felled to the ground, and bound hand and foot.

The next instant a rush was made for the wagon, and the two females were dragged forth.

In vain did their screams ring out on the still night air. They were heard by none but the barbaric horde that surrounded them.

Their hands were tied securely behind them, and the savages began to rifle the contents of the wagon.

Jobo, the native guide, stood by and smiled placidly.

"Jobo, this is your work!" shrieked Mrs. Dailey.

"The missus better keep mouth shut," was the quiet rejoinder.

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed the frightened woman. "What shall we do?"

"Courage, mother," whispered Adele. "Maybe they will not harm us after they have taken our property. Keep up a good heart."

When morning dawned the savage band started in a northeasterly direction through the forest, taking their captives with them.

CHAPTER VII.

ARMSTRONG TAKES "FRENCH LEAVE."

"We are going to start on an exploring expedition pretty soon, with Captain Dick Hazel at our head."

When Chris spoke thus of going on an exploring expedition, Dick began to think.

Why shouldn't they? Here they were, on the coast of a wild part of Africa, with no signs of any civilization whatever. They were well equipped for a trip through the forest and jungle. He liked adventure—why not explore a little until they came across a civilized spot?

Dick broached the idea to the rest.

"Of course," answered Chris, "that is the very thing I thought of when I spoke."

"Sartin, we will go on a splorin' voyage," said Sailor Jack. "You fellers will be ther young splorers, an' I'll be old Sailor Jack, in company as a kinder consort for ye. Go! Why, in course we will. 'Sure as pitch'll melt in ther sun!'"

"I'm satisfied, I am sure," said Armstrong, as all eyes were turned in his direction to ascertain what he thought of the idea. "I'll be satisfied with anything at all."

"Well, then," shouted Chris, "hurrah for Captain Dick Hazel, of the young explorers!"

The cheers were given with a will, and then all hands began making preparation for a start at once.

No signs of the other boats or any of the crew could be seen, and Dick judged that, if they had landed at all, they must have landed farther down on the coast.

Gathering up all their effects, they turned their backs to the coast and started inland in a southwesterly direction, to find, they knew not what.

All day they kept on the march, only halting once to take a slight lunch.

At length the sun began to sink low in the west, and the signs of nightfall began to make themselves known.

Dick and Armstrong happened to be a little in advance of the others, and at length, when they rounded a small bend where some rocks reared themselves over a tiny waterfall, the vindictive youth gave our hero a sudden push, causing him to lose his balance and topple over the edge of a huge boulder.

Dick made a desperate clutch as he felt himself falling, and succeeded in grasping the jagged edge of the boulder.

"Curse you, let go!" hissed Armstrong, kicking furiously at his fingers. "The alligators want you below!"

Our hero glanced hastily beneath him, and then gave an involuntary cry for help.

Beneath him a few feet was a dark, inky pool of water, and in it, with their jaws wide extended, as if inviting him to come down, were two monster crocodiles.

But the crocodiles were not to have a white boy for supper that night, for at the very moment our hero felt that he must let go his hold, Hans and Sailor Jack appeared upon the scene, and Armstrong was flung to the ground.

The next moment Dick was drawn safely up.

"Mine Gott, Dick! He vos try to kill you!" exclaimed Hans.

"You are right, Dutchy," replied Dick, regaining his breath, "and I am going to thrash him within an inch of his life for it, too! Raise him to his feet, Chris; he has got to live!"

"Good enough," replied Chris; "that's twice he has made an attempt on your life. If you don't thrash him soundly, I'll take a hand myself, and won't let up until I have finished him entirely."

"Now, Bob Armstrong," said Dick, rolling up his sleeves, "I

don't know whether I am able to whip you or not, but I am going to do my best. Rest assured that if I am able to do it at all—and I think I am—I am going to do it well. Now, then, are you willing to fight me, or must I force you?"

"I'll fight," was the reply, in a dogged tone.

"Ready!" shouted Chris, as the two faced each other.

Armstrong led off first, with a neat right-handed blow, which was at once neatly parried by our hero.

Spat!

This time Armstrong got it on the jugular vein, and he fell unconscious on the greensward.

It was several minutes before he regained his senses.

When he did so, he groaned dismally, and turned over on his side.

"Have you got enough?" asked our hero.

"Yes—for the present," was the reply.

"I am sorry I settled you so quick. I wanted to teach you a lesson."

"Blast me if I don't think he has got all the lesson he wants," chuckled Sailor Jack.

"Py chiminy, I guess me dot is so," said Hans.

"Sure," put in Chris. "Well, now that the fight is over, and it is beginning to get dark, I propose that we camp here. It is as good a place as we can find, perhaps."

No objection being raised, they proceeded to do so.

The first thing to be done was to start a good fire, to scare away any wild beasts that might be roaming about, and our friends began at once to gather some brushwood for the purpose, leaving Armstrong still lying on the ground.

In the space of a couple of minutes they returned to the spot with their arms full.

"Where is dot Armstrong?" ejaculated Hans.

Armstrong was nowhere to be seen. He had taken "French leave."

CHAPTER VIII.

ARMSTRONG FINDS AN ALLY.

As soon as Armstrong saw that his companions had turned their backs for a moment to search for wood with which to start a fire, he cautiously arose, and, picking up his coat and belt, he glided silently into the mazes of the jungle, out of sight.

He had made a sudden resolve to leave his companions and strike out on his own hook.

So strong was his hatred to Dick that he almost hesitated about leaving without first attempting to do him some injury, but on second thought he made up his mind to bide his time and wait for a better opportunity.

"He got the best of me this time, but my time will surely come," he muttered, as he made his way silently through the undergrowth, rifle in hand.

It soon began to grow dark, and Armstrong began to feel a little uneasy at being alone in a great forest where wild beasts had their lairs.

Presently, the roar of a lion was heard near at hand, and Armstrong, becoming now thoroughly frightened, took refuge up a tree.

"I almost wish I had stayed with Hazel and his crowd," he soliloquized, shivering, "for this is deucedly unpleasant, and no mistake. But, at any rate, I guess I can tough it out till morning; the lion can't get up here, that's one consolation."

Nearer and nearer came the sound, and presently the ferocious king of beasts was joined by another.

"My God!" gasped the treed villain. "One is bad enough, but

two is worse yet. I will stay here till morning, and then, if they don't go away, I'll have a chance of killing them."

With this conclusion, he settled down in a fork of the tree, and the lions becoming more silent, Armstrong at last fell into a fitful slumber.

When he awoke it was daylight, and, glancing beneath him, he found that his terrible tormentors of the night before were nowhere to be seen.

Gently extricating himself from his cramped position, he made his way slowly to the ground.

He at once set out through the jungle, holding his rifle in readiness, in case he met with some forest denizens who might oppose his further progress.

The rascally young sailor kept on his course for, perhaps, three or four hours, when suddenly he was startled to hear the sounds of guttural voices in the distance.

He also detected the smell of smoke, and he judged that he was nearing a camp of some kind.

Now, Armstrong possessed considerable nerve, although he had been terribly frightened by the pair of lions the night before, so he concluded to reconnoiter a bit before walking boldly to the camp, if such it really was.

Dropping to the ground, he made his way cautiously along in the direction the voices came from.

After spending about ten minutes in this manner, he at last came in sight of a small, natural clearing.

It was a camp, sure enough, that he saw, and it was composed of a dusky band of natives.

He raised his head, and peered cautiously about.

Suddenly he gave a violent start.

What did he see?

No wonder he was surprised, for in the center of the camp was a yoke of oxen and a large yellow-topped wagon, while on the ground near it, bound hand and foot, were four white persons.

It did not take him long to discover that two of them were females.

"Whew!" whistled Armstrong, under his breath. "Prisoners, eh? I wonder who they are, and what kind of a gang them cussed blacks are? I wonder how it would do to make friends with them, and join them? I've a good notion trying. Deucedly pretty girl that, and no mistake. I wonder who she is, and what white people are doing in this outlandish place, anyway? I guess I'll—"

The villain's soliloquy was suddenly cut short.

Something in the shape of a dusky hand seized him by the nape of his neck and jerked him over backward, with such force as to nearly knock the breath from his body.

"What do white man do here?" he heard a voice ask, and, glancing up, he beheld an ebony-colored native standing over him in a threatening attitude.

It was several seconds before Armstrong could find the use of his tongue, so sudden had it all happened.

When he did so, he said, in a supplicating tone of voice:

"Don't harm me, my good Mr. Native; I'm a friend."

"How I know you are friend?" asked his captor, still holding aloft the club.

"I'll tell you," said the villain, gaining a little courage at the delay he had gained; "I tried to kill one of the young fellows I was with, but got a good beating for it, so I watched my chance and left them. See?" and he pointed to his swollen nasal organ and bruised face, to verify his words.

"Do look so been licked," and the native lowered his club, a slight grin overspreading his dusky countenance.

"It's true," repeated Armstrong. "Now, if you let me be, I'll

join your party; I'd be a big assistance to you. See, I have got a good gun, and know how to use it. Then, we could hunt up the party I left, and I could get square on them."

"How many in party?"

"Four—three boys and an old sailor."

"Good! What your name, white man?"

"Bob Armstrong. Now, what is yours, my good chief?"

"My name Jobo; I a guide from Barmen. People there think I good nigger; but all these blacks my friends, and do what I say. Getting tired of town; like woods better."

"Ah, I see! Which way are you going now?"

"To village of black men—way over there. Ten, twenty, thirty days' travel."

"Well, Jobo, let me go with you, and if I don't do just as I say, why, kill me; that's all."

"All right, Strongarm; get up; go see my men."

Armstrong obeyed, thanking his stars for the lucky windfall he had struck.

Even as he arose to his feet, visions of the beautiful captive white girl he had seen came before his mind, and he already saw her as his bride, with his hated enemy, Dick Hazel, dying in agony at his feet.

CHAPTER IX.

HANS SUDDENLY DISAPPEARS.

"Well, I'll be blowed if the cussed warmint hasn't up anchor an' skedaddled, 'thout firing a parting salute!" exclaimed Sailor Jack, dropping his armful of wood to the ground.

"He has, sure enough," said Dick.

"I bet he will be sorry for it before long," remarked Chris.

"But, if he chooses to leave us, I am satisfied."

"It vos better dot he go, anyvay," put in Hans; for, py chiminy, he vos no goot."

"I don't suppose there is any use of us looking for him," said Dick, as he proceeded to kindle a fire; "so we may as well proceed to cook our supper."

Dick's companions nodded their heads in assent, and soon some steaks from the haunch of a species of red deer, which had been shot by Dick that afternoon, were sizzling over the fire, sending out an appetizing odor.

The young explorers were tired, from their long journey, and hungry, accordingly; and the last of their supper soon vanished.

It was necessary that a watch should be kept, so the four took turns at remaining on guard throughout the night. When morning dawned a hearty breakfast was eaten, and the young explorers again set out.

The atmosphere was hot and stifling, and they found traveling to be rather laborious, under the circumstances.

About noon they came to the banks of a dirty, sluggish stream, and the question as to how they were going to cross it confronted them.

They followed the marshy bank of the river for at least half a mile, but no suitable place for crossing came yet.

"Blowed if I ain't a-gittin' tired!" exclaimed Sailor Jack; "if we must git across, let's swim for it. I don't see any of them blasted crocodile critters about here."

Suddenly a loud commotion in the water was heard, and a monster hippopotamus was observed coming across the stream, and making directly for the spot where they stood.

Dick, who knew the nature of these amphibious animals, was aware of the fact that they seldom attacked any one unless molested.

Pretty soon they perceived a pair of crocodiles swimming in hot pursuit.

The river-horse, as he is sometimes termed, evidently did not like the idea of a fight with his pursuers, and he was putting in his best "licks," as the saying is, in his endeavor to reach the bank.

The young explorers stepped aside, at a safe distance, and awaited the result.

The crocodiles were steadily gaining, and presently the foremost one overtook the hippopotamus, and fastened his huge jaws in its flank.

Then ensued a scene which baffles description.

For the space of several moments the water flew like a fountain, and the deep stillness which had hitherto prevailed was broken by the snorting cries of the river-horse. The young explorers were spellbound, and gazed in speechless amazement at the terrible fight. Soon the water in the vicinity of the struggling combatants became dyed with blood, and the cries of the hippopotamus began to grow fainter.

The crocodiles had had the best of it from the start, and in ten minutes' time they had slain their enemy and began a fight over the carcass.

Soon half a dozen more of the scaly monsters appeared upon the scene, attracted by the smell of blood.

Our heroes watched until they became disgusted with the ferociousness of the scene, and then started on farther up the river. Presently, they arrived at a spot where a small hill reared itself abruptly.

The stream, which was very narrow at this point, suddenly disappeared altogether.

"Vell, py chiminy!" exclaimed Hans, "I vos plamed if the river dont' run away py a big hole in der groundt. I guess me dot I find me dot out already."

He stepped to the edge of the bank, as he spoke.

The river, which was what is known as a "blind" stream, started underground at this point, and rushed past with a very strong current.

Suddenly a portion of the bank on which Hans was standing gave way, pitching the inquisitive Dutchman headlong into the water.

A gurgling cry was heard, and he was sucked out of sight

CHAPTER X.

HIRAM BOFF MAKES HIS ESCAPE.

The native blacks, with Jobo at their head, proceeded on their journey with their prisoners.

Bob Armstrong had succeeded in getting on the best of terms with the rascally guide, and the two kept together pretty much of the time.

The villainous young seaman was very jubilant at the way things had turned out since his leaving his companions, and, when he had become accustomed to his new surroundings, he endeavored to get on friendly terms with the beautiful Adele Dailey.

But his friendly advances in that direction were lost, for the girl scorned him as though he had been a vile worm.

Two days passed.

The prisoners were treated fairly well, but they chafed under their confinement, and continually watched for a chance to make their escape.

At last a chance came—for one of them, at least.

As the party went into camp on the evening of the third day since the missionary and his family had been betrayed by the

treacherous Jobo, Hiram Boff, the Yankee, discovered that the thongs which bound his hands appeared to be working loose.

A little tugging and twisting proved that this was really the case, and he had the satisfaction, presently, of feeling them slip off altogether.

He was reclining at the foot of a large ironwood tree at the time, and was some distance from his friends—so far, in fact, that he was afraid to make the attempt to inform them of his good luck.

Slowly drawing his hands from behind his back, he began the task of untying the thongs which bound his legs.

In an almost incredible short time he had accomplished this feat; and then, keeping his eyes fixed on the blacks, he began moving on his back to the other side of the tree.

He managed to do this unobserved, and, when he had placed the huge tree between him and his captors, he breathed a sigh of relief.

Gently turning over on his stomach, he crawled silently into the jungle.

Arriving at a safe distance from the camp, he arose to his feet, stretched himself, and chuckled.

"That was putty well did, darned if it wasn't!" he said to himself. "I wish I could git ther dominie and his folks away, too; but I can't do it at present. I'll have to hunt up the fellers I heard that dod-rotted Armstrong talkin' about, and get their assistance. Mebbe we kin do sumthin' then. I guess I hed better see if my weepins are all right. Bully idea of mine—they cow-hides."

"The 'cowhides' in question were an immense pair of top-boots, which Hiram always wore. He had not had them off since the night of his capture, and he chuckled almost audibly as he stooped down and drew a heavy Colt's revolver and a keen-edged bowie-knife from them.

"The darned varmints didn't think of lookin' there for any weepins," he muttered. "I tell you, Hiram, you're cute, if I do say it myself."

Well knowing that it would not be long before his escape would be discovered, Hiram thrust his revolver and knife in his belt, and started at a quick pace through the tangled undergrowth.

Scarce five minutes had elapsed since he left the tree at the camp, and presently he heard the loud, guttural yells of the blacks, which told him plainly that they were acquainted with the knowledge of his absence.

"If the darned rascals catch me," muttered Hiram, between his clinched teeth, "they hev got ter be good on ther run, thet's all. I'll lead them a game of fox and hounds."

Putting in his best licks, the Yankee went crashing through the jungle, making a large amount of noise and not very fast headway.

He soon found that he had to be more cautious, for, being led by the noise he made, the blacks were now in close pursuit.

Presently Hiram changed his tactics by ceasing in his headlong rush and starting silently in an oblique direction.

When he halted, his pursuers stopped also; but, thinking it some trick to throw them off the track, they at once began to spread out in all directions.

"Darn their black hides! They mean business. But I'll be blamed if they are goin' ter catch me. I'll cut some of their winds short first!"

On went the Yankee, as fast and as silent as possible.

Presently he had the satisfaction of hearing the sounds of pursuit gradually lessening.

Finally they ceased altogether.

Hiram kept on until at last, completely tired out, he took refuge in a tree, and fell asleep.

When the morning dawned, he awoke, and found that he was in the wildest-looking part of the country he had ever seen.

"I guess I had better look about an' see if I kin find sumthin' for breakfast," said Hiram, stretching himself, "for I'll be darned if I ain't hungry."

Revolver in hand, he picked his way through the dense woods, and at last came to a little glade.

Suddenly he heard the sounds of approaching footsteps.

Halting, he peered in the direction the sounds came from, and gave a start.

Coming toward him was the figure of a man, gaunt and half-starved in appearance.

"Oh, py chiminy gracious! Mister, vill you give me somedings to eat mine mouth with!" exclaimed the stranger, as he saw Hiram.

It was Hans, the German.

CHAPTER XI.

THE VILLAGE OF THE BLACKS.

Several days passed by, and at last Jobo and his party came in sight of the village of the blacks.

The village consisted of about fifty or sixty mud huts, built in a pleasant little valley, surrounded on all sides by huge, frowning mountains.

The people, who numbered considerably over a thousand, flocked to greet the returning warriors.

It was plain that Jobo was no stranger there, for on every hand he was met with extreme courtesy.

Armstrong had proved such a faithful villain—if such a term may be used—that he now acted as a sort of lieutenant to Jobo.

The Reverend J. L. Dailey and his wife and daughter had suffered considerably from the long journey, and they were glad that it was over.

But the prospect of being released from their captors was a disheartening one.

They were now hundreds of miles away from the limits of civilization.

The missionary was consigned to one of the huts, all by himself, while Adele and her mother were placed in another.

The prisoners had given up all hope of Hiram Boff being alive, for they thought he must certainly have perished, alone in the forest and unarmed, as they supposed him to be.

On the night of the return of the party to the village of the savages—which was called Linkumpinch—Belek, the chief, or ruler, of the village, ordered a huge bonfire to be made, and a general dance to take place.

The prisoners were brought out to witness this, and a horrible sight it was.

When the order to start was given, the blacks, who were naked, save for a breech-clout made of skins about their loins, and armed with their huge war clubs, began cutting all sorts of grotesque figures around the fire.

All the females in the place were there, and they began singing a discordant sort of a chant with their horrible, cracked voices.

Armstrong, to keep in the good favor of the blacks, joined in the dance.

When this sort of business had been kept up for perhaps twenty minutes, a savage young lion was brought into the midst of the dancers and, turned loose.

Then the sport—if such it could be called—began in earnest.

Armstrong turned pale at this new addition to the crowd, and trembled visibly.

He began to cast his eyes about him for a place of safety, as he had had all the experience he desired to have with lions a short time before.

Jobo, who was by his side, noticed this, and he hastened to reassure the cowardly villain, saying:

"Don't mind the lion; he kill two or three, and then he git killed himself."

"That's poor consolation," thought Armstrong, "when you don't know who the two or three that will be killed may be. But as I am into this, I may as well put on a bold front and appear as brave as I can."

Jobo was about right in his explanation of the affair, for, as soon as the lion found that he was free, he uttered a deafening roar and gave a mighty bound at one of the blacks, throwing him to the ground and literally tearing him to pieces.

This appeared to be the signal for a general onslaught upon the lion, for, uttering their fiendish, guttural cries, the blacks made a rush at him, with their war clubs and knives, each trying to outdo the other in being the one to give the animal his death blow.

The struggle was kept up for perhaps ten minutes, during which three or four of the blacks were killed, and as many more wounded.

Then a lithe, agile young warrior succeeded in cutting the throat of the enraged beast, and the struggle was ended.

After this the dance was kept up until the participants were completely tired out, and then the prisoners were led back to their huts.

The sight had been a sickening one to Adele and her mother, and the two cried themselves to sleep.

The next morning Armstrong appeared at the door of the hut, and, after knocking in mock politeness, walked in.

"Good-morning," said he, a bland smile overspreading his countenance.

The two females deigned no reply to this salute, but hung their heads in silence.

"What's the matter?" asked Armstrong, in a louder key. "Have you both lost the use of your tongues?"

"What do you want, villain?" exclaimed Mrs. Dailey, looking up.

"Go out of here and leave us alone!" put in Adele.

"Ha! I thought you would speak. Now, listen to what I say. I will give you one week in which to make up your mind."

"What is it?" asked Adele, tremblingly.

"It is simply this: Unless you agree to marry me one week from to-day—your father can perform the ceremony—you shall have the pleasure of seeing your father have one of his legs cut off."

"Oh, my God!" moaned Mrs. Dailey. "Villain, how can you be so cruel?"

"Hush, mother," said Adele. Then, to Armstrong:

"You dare not do it!"

"Don't I? You refuse, and see if I won't! If you should refuse—and I don't think you will—this will certainly happen. Then you will be given another week, and, if you don't come to terms then, the other leg will follow after its mate. If by chance you should still refuse, one of his arms will follow, a week later, and seven days after that the other one; then you will be given one day, and, if you don't consent then, off goes the Reverend J.

L. Dailey's head. Now, you can ponder over this, and one week from to-day I will call for an answer."

With these words, the wretch laughed, mockingly, and left the hut.

CHAPTER XII.

THE YANKEE AND THE GERMAN IN HARD LUCK.

"Great pumpkin vines!" exclaimed Hiram Boff, as the figure of the half-starved Hans appeared before him. "What on airth is it, I'd like ter know?"

"Oh, mister, give me somedings to eat!" repeated Hans. "I is most starved mine mouth out!"

"All right, Dutchy; jist wait a little, an' I guess I kin accommodate yer. That's one thing about the Boff family—they always were accommodating. But I suppose you air hungry, Dutchy; you look so. I guess we had better see about gittin' breakfast. How would broiled monkey do? I see lots of the pesky critters about in the trees."

"Dey will do, oh, mister man! By chiminy, what vill I do?"

"Now, jist wait a minute," said Hiram, suddenly becoming sorry for the poor fellow.

Drawing his revolver from his bootleg, he began searching about for something to shoot.

It did not take him long before he came across a flock of some large birds upon the ground, feeding.

Being pretty close, he managed to hit a pair of them.

A fire was started, and these were soon broiling over the coals.

Before the birds were half cooked, Hans seized them both and began devouring them, ravenously.

"Now, Dutchy," said Hiram, lighting his pipe, after he had finished his meal, "tell me who you are, and all about you."

"I vill, good mister man; my name is Hans Strauss, und I vos born mit Germany——"

"You don't need ter tell me that—I knows it," interrupted the Yankee. "Where did you come from, now, is what I want to know? Was you one of the party that a fellow by the name of Armstrong was with?"

"Yes, py chiminy! I vos, and I vish me dot we find Dick and Chris, und dot old fellow we call Sailor Chack."

"Well, Dutchy, that's what I wanted to know. Now, tell me where your companions are, an' how you got away from them."

"By chiminy! I fall me a river in, and go mit de ground under for 'bout one hour, und den come out py de odder side; but mine cōmbanions were not dere. I subbose dey t'ink me deadt already. I lose mine rifle and bistols, und get choked mit der water pesides. I tell you, it is too pad; py chiminy, it is!"

"H'm! You hev had a time, sure's wooden nutmegs grow in Connecticut," said Hiram.

"Now that you have told me all about you, I'll tell yer a little somethin' about myself. My name air Hiram Boff, and I was with a dominie an' his wife an' daughter, which was captured by some blasted niggers. But I managed ter git away from them, an' here I are. That fellow, Armstrong, that was with you is with ther gang, and I guess he is high cock in ther pit with 'em. Now, as we understand each other putty well, you kin call me Hiram an' I'll call you Hans, an' we'll start out to look for your friends."

Hans said nothing, but assented by a nod of his head, and the two at once set out on their quest to find the young explorers.

Hiram found the trail Hans had made before the two met, and this he concluded to follow, and so reach the river from which the German had so miraculously escaped.

"How far do you think it is to the river, Dutchy?" asked the Yankee, as the two threaded their way through the confines of the forest.

"Mine Gott! I know me not! I guess I go me 'roundt und 'roundt mid de voods, when I no find Dick un' de rest," replied Hans.

"Well, we'll hev ter do ther best we kin, thet's all. So come on—let yourself go. But I'll be blamed if it ain't tough work, though."

Hiram was about right. So dense was the undergrowth that it was with great difficulty that they managed to make their way through at all.

"Hark! Vot is dot noise?" suddenly asked Hans, assuming a listening attitude.

"I hear somethin', too, Dutchy; wait a minute, an' listen for it ag'in. Maybe it are the ones we are lookin' for."

The noise which had attracted the attention of Hans appeared to come from their right, and the sounds grew rapidly nearer.

Now, Hiram was a cute one, as the saying is, and, while he hoped it might be Dick Hazel and his companions who were approaching, he feared that it might not. So, holding his revolver in his hand, ready for instant use, he made his way in the direction the noise came from, followed by Hans.

Presently they emerged in a sort of clearing, and then, as the sounds of approaching men were very close at hand, Hiram motioned to Hans to stop, setting the example himself by coming to an abrupt halt.

They had scarcely done so, when a band of half-naked blacks burst through the thicket not twenty yards away from them.

"Py chiminy!" exclaimed Hans. "I guess me dot we are gone now!"

"Come, Dutchy, we hev got ter run for it!" said the Yankee, taking to his heels.

But the natives had seen them, and, uttering their guttural cries, they at once started in pursuit.

The blacks, who were in their native element, had a way of squeezing through the undergrowth that was truly alarming to the two fugitives.

The Yankee saw that they were losing ground at every step, and he felt that they would be overtaken very soon.

At length the two fleeing ones entered a growth of acacia thorns, which at every touch drew blood from their bodies.

"By gracious!" said the Yankee, in a despairing tone, "this is worse than being run through a corn-sheller. I tell you, Dutchy, we are in hard luck."

"I guess me dot ve are," replied Hans, who was now trembling from pure fright.

"Well, the only thing we kin do is ter make a stand an' die fighting. You take this knife, an' make mince-meat outen ther first one thet comes near enough ter yer."

Hiram handed his knife to Hans as he spoke, and, turning about, raised his revolver and sent a couple of shots into the ranks of the advancing blacks.

Each bullet found its billet, and two of the savage band fell to rise no more.

This served to check the blacks for one brief moment, and then, with one accord, they uttered a prolonged cry of rage, which gradually grew in volume until it became almost deafening.

Flourishing their spears aloft, they made a rush for the two fugitives.

Hiram emptied the chambers of his weapon in their midst, and then, throwing the now useless weapon from him, stood, with folded arms, awaiting death, which he felt was certain.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE YOUNG EXPLORERS ARE JUST IN TIME.

For several moments after the sudden disappearance of Hans, Dick Hazel and his companions remained speechless.

So sudden had it happened that it was difficult for them to realize what had really taken place.

At length Dick broke the silence.

"My God!" he gasped; "that winds up the earthly career of poor Hans!"

"You are right," replied Chris. "Nothing could save him from being sucked under and drowned in that strong underground current."

"He mought come out alive at t'other end," said Sailor Jack. "I've hearn tell of sich things, blast me if I ain't."

"You may be right," answered Dick; "but it's doubtful, I guess. At any rate, we had better follow in the direction this river seems to run, and try and find out where it comes out again—if it really does."

"Quite right," replied Chris; "let us be off at once."

Shouldering their rifles, our friends started over the hill, following the course of the underground river, as near as they could judge.

After searching about for some time, they at last came across a spot where indications plainly showed that some one had traveled that way not long before, for in many places the bushes were broken, and the wild flowers showed unmistakable signs of having been trampled upon.

At length, coming to a moist, bare spot of ground, they plainly detected the prints of Hans' hob-nailed shoes.

"Hurrah!" shouted Dick. "The Dutchman still lives! He must have escaped by a miracle."

With much lighter hearts, the young explorers started to follow the trail, which, their compass told them, led in anything but a straight course.

But they stuck to it closely, and, when night came, they pitched their camp, feeling sure that they would overtake Hans before twenty-four hours more passed over their heads.

When morning dawned, as soon as breakfast was eaten, they again started out, still following the trail, which did not show quite as plainly as it had the day before.

But, at any rate, it was plain enough, and they kept on for about an hour, when they found traces of a recent fire, and also a different footprint from that of Hans.

This was perplexing. It surely belonged to a white man, for it was not likely that any of the natives wore boots or shoes, and, besides, the footprints seemed to proceed in harmony along with those made by Hans.

All day long the young explorers kept up the tramp, and at length they saw that the sun was rapidly sinking in the west.

The day had been a very hot one, and they were pretty well tired out.

But Dick was confident that they were close to Hans and his unknown companion now, and he was just about to tell Chris and the old salt so, when all hands were startled by the report of a pistol shot very close at hand.

It was followed by another, and still another, and kept on going till six shots had been fired.

Then a loud, fiendish yell rang out.

The young explorers, with Dick Hazel at their head, dashed pell-mell into the thicket, in the direction of the sounds.

Scarcely a minute elapsed before they burst into a small open space, and a startling sight met their eyes.

Standing at bay, at the edge of a thorny thicket, were two white

men, while rushing down upon them, with uplifted clubs and spears, were over a score of half-naked blacks.

The two whites were Hans Strauss and Hiram Boff.

Even as the foremost savage was about to crush Hiram Boff's skull with his huge club, the report of a rifle rang out, and the dusky villain fell to the earth, with a bullet in his brain.

It was Dick who had fired the shot.

The next instant the three rifles began pouring a veritable hail-storm of bullets into the savage horde, and they commenced dropping right and left, like ten-pins.

Before the Winchester repeaters held by the young explorers were half emptied, all of the blacks, who were able to do so, had fled from the scene, leaving eight or ten of their number dead upon the ground.

Then Hans, recognizing his friends for the first time, gave a shout and sprang forward, exclaiming:

"Mine Gott! Dick, my boy, how are you? Und Chris, und Sailor Chack? Oh! py chiminy! dis is pully, und don't you forget me dot!"

Hiram Boff also strode forward, and seized Dick by the hand.

"Stranger," said he, "Hiram Boff wants ter shake hands with you, and thank you for saving his life. The Boffs never forget a kindness, an' you kin cowhide me through a ten-acre lot if I don't return the favor some day."

Then Hans, in his queer way, related all that had occurred, and Hiram was at once voted as an excellent addition to the party.

Dick and Chris became very much interested when Hiram described the capture of the missionary and his family, and what followed.

"We will follow after them, and endeavor to rescue them as soon as possible," said our hero.

The next morning, a little after daybreak, our party struck out in the direction, as near as Hiram could judge, taken by Jobo's band and their captives.

Their course led them in the same direction that the river in which Hans so nearly lost his life ran, and one day, nearly exhausted from their long tramp, the young explorers struck out at a point many miles from the spot where they had last seen it.

The scene at this point was a grand one, but everything appeared so deserted-looking that it had a strange, weird sort of appearance.

"I don't believe the foot of a white man ever traveled these parts before," said Chris.

"Nor I, either," replied Dick. "Hello! I've got an idea!"

He came to a halt as he spoke.

Before them lay a large tree, which had fallen directly over into the river, which still, with strong current, flowed in the same direction.

The tree was attached to the bank by only a few fibers, and Dick saw that it would be easy work to dislodge it and set it adrift.

"I propose to travel by water for a day or two," said he; "this tree will make a first-class raft. The river goes in the direction we want to go, and, in my opinion, will beat walking all hollow."

"By gosh! cap'en, I think you air about as near right as I ever seed any one. We kin get aboard this tree and let her go down ther river, an', if at any time we don't like her for a craft, we kin walk ashore, that's all. Let's launch her—what do you say, all hands?"

"A good idea," said Chris; "but wait until we cut a couple of poles to keep the tree clear from the banks, as we drift on, and then we will get aboard."

In an exceedingly short time the necessary poles were secured,

and, after Dick had severed the small roots that held it to the bank, all hands began to push upon the tree.

It yielded to a very little exertion on their part, and presently it floated clean and clear.

"All aboard!" shouted Hiram. "We are off for Bosting!"

He seized a bough of the tree as he spoke, and sprang aboard, followed by his companions.

The strong current of the river now caught the tree, and they were soon going along at quite a fast speed.

CHAPTER XIV.

THROUGH THE MOUNTAIN.

The days passed by.

The young explorers still kept their place upon the tree, which floated continually on, carried along by the strange, irresistible force of the current of the river.

Frequent stops were made to supply them with game, but, as it was much easier traveling in this manner than making their way on foot through the dense jungles, they still adhered to their improvised raft, and, besides, Hiram Boff stuck to it that they were going in the exact direction taken by Jobo and his band of native blacks.

Early one morning, after they had been several days upon the river, they found themselves in close proximity to a range of mountains, through which they discerned a pass, which allowed the river to keep on its way.

The stream narrowed considerably here, and the current ran much stronger.

High, rocky walls were on either hand, but presently they emerged through the pass and found themselves in a beautiful valley, in the center of which was a barbaric village.

"Hello!" exclaimed Dick. "This must be the headquarters of the very party we are in search of. A pretty kettle of fish we'll be in now, if the natives happen to see us."

"We had better lay low, and keep concealed from observation," said Chris. "The leaves on the tree will hide us, I think."

"Great pumpkin vines!" suddenly ejaculated Hiram Boff, "if there ain't Dominie Dailey tied fast to a tree, I'm a sinner! And— Oh, scissors! there comes ther missus an' her pretty daughter toward him. There, see; they are a-talkin' to him. Well, by gracious! if there ain't that cuss you call Armstrong there, too. Wonders will never cease. This 'ere floatin' tree'll surprise somebody 'fore long, as sure as tobacker grows in Connecticut!"

The Yankee rattled his words off so fast that at last he became so excited that he had to cease altogether.

Dick and Chris glanced in the direction he pointed, and saw that he was right. There, sure enough, were two men and two females conversing under a tree.

One of the former they easily recognized as Bob Armstrong.

To think was to act with our hero, and, being the acknowledged leader of the party, he at once proceeded to put a hastily-constructed plan into execution.

Seizing one of the poles they had cut for the purpose, Dick began pushing the tree toward the side nearest the four white people.

He kept well concealed from vision, as did his companions, for the blacks appeared to be numerous in the village.

The huge tree neared the shore considerably, and still drifted sluggishly on its way.

Presently the young explorers saw the two females coming down toward the river.

As Dick glanced at the beautiful Adele, his heart gave a jump,

and he made up his mind to rescue the prisoners or die in the attempt.

But his eyes were suddenly called from the young girl by hearing the animated sounds of a scuffle beneath the tree, near the river bank.

The distance was not over a hundred yards, and he soon observed what was going on.

Armstrong and the dominie were evidently quarreling. Suddenly Armstrong whipped out a knife.

As Armstrong raised his murderous knife to strike the captive missionary, Dick placed his rifle to his shoulder, and, taking a hasty aim, pulled the trigger.

As the report rang out, Armstrong fell to the ground, and Adele and her mother rushed, screaming, to the missionary's side.

Seizing the knife of the fallen ruffian, Adele severed the thong which bound her father to the tree, and then all three rushed to the bank of the river, and sprang into the canoe.

The next instant a perfect chorus of demoniacal yells rang out, and the blacks, attracted by the rifle shot, began to swarm from all directions to the riverside.

Armstrong staggered to his feet, his right arm dangling at his side.

His wrist had been broken by the bullet from Dick's rifle.

The Reverend John L. Dailey paddled the canoe, with all his might, straight for the floating tree, which now was but a few feet distant.

There were other canoes about, and, quickly utilizing some of these, the blacks started in pursuit.

Then a regular broadside was fired from the innocent-looking tree, which created a panic and caused them to put back to the shore.

But Armstrong was not to be baffled in this way, and, calling Jobo to his side, the two soon filled one of the larger canoes with the best warriors and started after the fugitives.

At that moment the missionary's canoe struck the tree, and he at once tried to board it, when a voice almost at his elbow said:

"Hold on—stay where you are! I guess we can do better in the canoe than we can on this tree. Hurry up, fellows, get in."

It was Dick who uttered the words, and in a very short space of time all hands had joined the dominie's family in the canoe, which was a large one, and capable of holding them nicely.

Then began a race for life.

The savage blacks rushed down on either bank, yelling themselves hoarse, and throwing missiles at the fleeing ones.

On, on, went the two canoes, the swift current adding greatly to their speed.

There were four paddles in the canoe, and these were skillfully managed by the boys. Soon they had the satisfaction of seeing that their pursuers were not gaining upon them.

More than once had Dick raised his rifle to shoot the villain Armstrong dead, as he sat in the canoe, but the missionary had stayed him with the words:

"Don't my boy; don't! Do not shed blood needlessly; return good for evil."

So they kept on.

Soon the barbaric village was left behind, and they saw that they were going directly toward a tall, black-looking mountain, which loomed up close at hand.

The river suddenly grew much narrower, and a slippery, rocky wall showed itself on either side.

Suddenly a commotion was observed in the pursuing canoe.

The blacks began plying their paddles frantically, as if endeavoring to reach the shore.

Thinking that they were bent upon some new deviltry, Hiram Boff fired a shot at them.

One of the blacks uttered a cry, and, dropping the paddle he was using with all his might, fell overboard.

At the same moment the canoe shot out into the middle of the stream again, and its inmates uttered a dismal wail, and threw down their paddles, as if in the utmost despair.

It was then that Dick and his party learned the cause of the strange actions of their pursuers.

Glancing ahead of them, they saw that they were approaching with quickening speed, a dark, tunnel-like passage, which led, apparently, through the very mountain itself.

Our hero's face turned pale. No wonder the native blacks had become alarmed. It seemed that they were rapidly approaching a certain death, for the speed with which the river ran showed that there must be a falls somewhere in the near vicinity.

The next minute the canoe shot into the dark passage, followed closely by that containing Armstrong and his rascally followers.

CHAPTER XV.

THE YELLOW-SKINNED NATIVES OF THE VALLEY.

On went the two canoes through the dark tunnel, the terrified cries of the blacks being drowned by the roar of the rushing waters.

The missionary's wife and daughter crouched low in the bottom of the canoe, in a fainting condition, while the remainder of its occupants were held spellbound with awe.

The dusky natives in the other canoe were moaning in terror, and it seemed as if they were striving to press their faces through its very bottom.

Bob Armstrong was the only one who held his head up, and he was too scared to speak.

On, on, they went, through the darkness, carried on by the swift, turbulent stream.

It was no longer a case of pursued and pursuers; both were on an equal footing now, and it seemed as if they were being pursued by the grim monster, Death, who would soon overtake them.

Several hours passed. The roar of the waters had now become deafening, and still the two canoes were whirled along like corks in a millrace.

Presently it began to gradually grow lighter.

They were nearing an outlet somewhere.

Soon it was almost as light as the outside world.

Armstrong, who was anxiously peering ahead of him, suddenly saw the canoe containing Dick Hazel and his companions disappear from sight amid a shower of spray.

The next instant the frail craft of the blacks struck a shelving piece of rock, and its occupants were thrown unceremoniously out, some going overboard and others landing headlong on a bed of white sand.

Armstrong and Jobo were among the latter, and it was some time before they were able to rise to their feet.

Eight of the fifteen blacks who had manned the canoe lay upon the sand.

Jobo at once proceeded to arouse them to their senses.

They all arose to their feet save one, and it was impossible for him to do so, for the man was dead.

Whether he had died of fright, or been killed by the concussion, we are at loss to say, but suffice it to say that he was stone dead.

This left the number of the pursuing party to be nine in all, counting Armstrong and Jobo.

Queer fancies flashed through the mind of Dick Hazel as the canoe was being rushed madly along through the darkness.

His thoughts went back to the time he had been enticed aboard the ill-fated *Becky A. Malvern*, and he wondered what was going on at the home of his uncle, John Holton.

He now felt certain that his uncle had been the instigator of the foul scheme to kidnap him, so that he himself might become the possessor of his property.

It looked now as though he would never return to thwart the vile scheme.

None in the canoe had spoken for a long time, and Dick had his thoughts to himself.

Presently Hiram Boff spoke.

"I say," said he, in a loud tone, so as to make himself heard above the roaring of the waters, "this is a-gitting mighty tiresome like. How long do you think we have been in this 'ere all-fired tunnel?"

"About a couple of hours, as near as I can judge," retorted Chris.

On, on, they went, until at last a good deal of their fear had worn off.

Dick's hopes began to rise. What if they should come out all right, after all?

At any rate, he began to feel better, and, taking his place in the bow of the canoe, he endeavored to pierce the gloom ahead of him, to find signs of an outlet.

The hours dragged by.

Dick had become tired, and closed his eyes.

Suddenly he opened them, and observed that it was growing light.

Chris noticed it at the same time.

They were nearing an outlet, they were sure.

In two minutes it was as light as day, and the next instant the roar of the waters increased in volume.

All hands started involuntarily.

Dick glanced ahead of him, and his face turned an ashen hue.

The canoe was nearing a rapids.

Half a minute more, and it shot over the brink, with frightful velocity.

Down, down, went the canoe through the boiling, surging waters, as straight as an arrow from a bow.

Every one in the frail cockleshell thought the next moment would be their last.

But fate decreed it otherwise; as if by a miracle, they kept clear of the black, jagged rocks, which showed themselves here and there, and at last floated in comparatively tranquil water.

Below the rapids the current of the river ran very mildly, and it was with a great feeling of relief that all hands raised their heads and gazed at their new surroundings.

They had entered a valley similar, somewhat, to the one occupied by the blacks at the other side of the mountains, only the vegetation was more rank, and grew in richer profusion.

The canoe drifted for about a mile down the river, and then Hiram Boff seized one of the paddles and steered it ashore.

Dick Hazel was the first to spring upon the river bank, and taking off his cap, he waved it in the air and exclaimed:

"I name this spot Adele's Valley. Hurrah for the Young Explorers!"

All hands joined in the hurrahing, and the pretty Adele blushed a crimson hue at the compliment—for compliment it really was at having such a beautiful valley named after her.

"We should be very thankful for our miraculous deliverance

from what seemed to be a certain death," said the missionary, as he stepped ashore.

"Amen!" responded his wife, while the rest took off their hats.

Some cocoanut trees grew close at hand, and they were soon devouring some of the luscious nuts.

Then taking their rifles, Dick, Chris and the Yankee started off into the tangled mazes of the underbrush in search of something more substantial.

They managed to shoot a fine buck and were returning, when a shrill scream rang out.

The next instant the crack of a revolver was heard, and the confused sound of many voices.

Dropping the meat of the water buck, our three friends dashed in the direction the sounds came from.

It was at least ten minutes before they reached the spot, and a startling sight met their gaze.

There were the remainder of their party, surrounded by about forty yellow-skinned savages.

They were all remarkably tall and finely-formed men, and their long, jet-black hair hung down over their shoulders as straight as that of a North American Indian.

Beautiful Adele Dailey was held tightly in the arms of a savage, who, according to his gaudy head-dress, seemed to be the leader.

The poor girl gave a scream and fainted.

At this, Dick's blood boiled, and he raised his rifle to his shoulder to send a bullet through the savage's brain.

"Don't!" interposed Chris, "what would you do? We could do nothing with these fellows now. Why, they would overpower us too quick to think about. Bide your time and wait for a more fitting opportunity to rescue the captives. What we do with such powerful-looking men as they are will have to be done by strategy. Let us follow them at a safe distance, and, in the meantime, we may be able to devise some plan to rescue them. Come, use a little judgment—that's a good fellow."

Dick lowered his weapon.

"You are right, Chris," said he; "but, my God! I can't see them harm that girl."

"They don't mean to harm her at present. See how tenderly that big fellow handles her—there, they are going; let's follow them, and be cautious about it, too."

Chris was right.

Having bound the hands of the male prisoners, the savages picked up Mrs. Dailey and Adele in their arms, and started off through the dense woods.

They could hear the voice of Hans bemoaning his sad lot, from where they stood, but it was of no use—he was marched along with the others.

"This is tough!" said Hiram Boff; "it air a genuine case of 'out of ther fryin' pan into ther fire,' with us. Gosh! if it ain't."

As soon as the band of yellow-skins had turned their backs and started on their way, our three friends started cautiously to follow them.

The strange race were fast walkers, and it was difficult for our hero and his companions to keep up with them.

Presently they struck a beaten path, and then traveling was much easier.

It was sundown when at last the party came to a village of thatched huts, which were of a neat-looking appearance, to say the least.

Dick Hazel and his two companions had been watching the proceedings from a safe place of concealment, and it was with a feeling of great satisfaction they saw that the captives were safe for a time.

Dick meant to rescue them that very night, if possible, and then make their way over the mountains in the direction of the sea coast, toward Barmen, whence the missionary had started from.

A couple of hours passed by, and all seemed quite in the semi-barbaric village.

"I am going on a tour of investigation," said Dick; "you two stay here till I come back."

So saying, he stole cautiously from his place of concealment and began crawling slowly in the direction of the huts.

Nearer and nearer he approached, now stopping to listen at some sound, and then starting on again.

Suddenly, as he placed his hands before him, he felt nothing but empty air, and losing his balance he pitched forward and fell headlong downward for a dozen feet or more.

An angry growl greeted him as he staggered to his feet, half stunned by the fall.

Drawing a match from his pocket he ignited it.

A cry of horror escaped his lips.

He had fallen in a pit with a ferocious lion!

It was several minutes after Dick had left Chris and Hiram Boff before either spoke a word.

Suddenly the smothered roar of a lion rang out, close at hand.

Chris and Hiram sprang to their feet and grasped their rifles, ready for the beast if he made his appearance.

The roar sounded so close that they had cause to be alarmed.

Almost at the same instant the crack of a rifle rang out, followed by the roar of the lion again, only more fierce this time.

With one impulse Chris and the Yankee started with a bound in the direction the sound of the shot came from.

It was this way Dick had gone, and they had but one idea now, and that was to give him their help.

Before Chris and Hiram had traversed half the distance to where Dick was, they observed causes for fresh alarm.

Numerous lights were dancing up and down, and coming from the village of the yellow-skins.

They, too, had been attracted by the report of the rifle.

Chris thought it about time to call out.

"Dick—Dick!" he shouted, "where are you? Answer, for God's sake!"

"Here I am; hurry up and get me out. I'm in a pit!" came the reply, which they recognized as Dick's voice.

Then, by keeping up the conversation, they had no difficulty in finding the pit in which our hero had fallen.

"Where is the lion?" asked Chris.

"Dead!" was the reply.

"Now get me out of here as quick as you can, for, I suppose, those confounded yellow-skins will be down upon us the first thing we know."

It was not long before Chris found a way to get Dick out of the pit.

Unbuckling his belt, he lowered it down as far as he could reach.

Dick at once seized the end of it, and the next moment he was safely out.

Nearly a hundred of the yellow-skins, carrying torches, were now dangerously close at hand, and our three friends took in the situation at a glance.

"We have got to run for it," said Dick, with clinched teeth. Come!"

He sprang away to the right as he spoke, followed by his two companions.

The yellow-skins were now not over two hundred yards away, and turning about for a brief moment, Dick poured half a dozen shots from his rifle into the ranks of their advancing foes.

Before the rapid cracking of Dick's rifle had ceased, Chris and Hiram took a hand at the same business.

A dozen or more of the yellow-skins fell to the ground to rise no more, and observing the deadly effect of the weapons in the hands of the whites, the band stopped stock-still for a minute or two, and examined their fallen companions.

This gave Dick and his two friends time to gain a good lead upon them again, and they were now dashing away with renewed speed.

Up, up they went, over boulders, along ledges, and then, for a little way, across a level plateau.

The light from the many flaming torches carried by the yellow-skins cast its reflection upon the jagged sides of the mountains, and showed Dick and his two companions to them as plain almost as day.

At last the three fugitives rounded a bend, and then all was draped in darkness.

Dick was just about to congratulate himself, when suddenly Hiram Boff uttered a cry and disappeared.

There was a rattle of falling stones and loosened dirt, and then all was still as the grave.

CHAPTER XVI.

DICK AND ARMSTRONG MEET FACE TO FACE.

Bob Armstrong was furious at the rescue of the missionary and his family, and was anxious to be after them, as he told Jobo.

"Which way do Strong Arm want to go?" asked Jobo.

"I want to find Dick Hazel and the girl first, and then, after that, we had better try and find our way back to Linkumpinch, the other side of these mountains," was the reply.

"All right; do as you say; come on, we go find."

Leading the way, Jobo started along the river bank, followed by Armstrong and the remaining blacks.

In the course of half an hour they came to the spot where the yellow-skins had captured the missionary's family and their two friends.

"It looks as though somethin' a little bit more than common has happened here," said Armstrong; "let's follow this trail and see what we can find."

Accordingly they set out through the dense jungle, making their way along over the trail made by the yellow-skins and their captives.

At length they struck the beaten path, and their progress became easier.

They followed this along until they at last came in sight of the village of the strange natives.

Armstrong called a halt.

"I guess we won't go any farther in this direction," he said. "It seems that some one has done the work of getting rid of Dick Hazel for me. Do you know anything about these natives, Jobo? Are they friendly with your people?"

"No heard of this place before; never hear of people here," replied Jobo, shaking his head.

At that moment they observed some of the yellow-skins at the outskirts of their village.

"Well, I'm blowed!" exclaimed Armstrong; "if they ain't got yellow skins. See how tall and straight they are, too. I guess we had better make ourselves scarce from this neighborhood. They might make it hot for us."

"Strong Arm is right; let's go to the mountains; leave Dick Hazel and girl alone. Come."

Armstrong vouchsafed no reply, but followed the dusky guide

as he led the way toward a range of mountains which loomed up a mile or two away.

"Get over mountains, strike open country, den find where we are," said Jobo. "Dis no good place down here; everything strange; strange people, strange place."

The other blacks seemed to be much put out by the appearance of the yellow-skins, and they kept up a conversation among themselves as they journeyed along.

It was slow and laborious work, and they had to stop quite often in order to regain their breath.

It was nightfall when they had made their way up perhaps five or six hundred feet, and Armstrong concluded to stay where they were for the night.

The spot they had halted upon was a level plateau of a few yards in extent.

A narrow ledge of rock, skirting a deep chasm, which appeared to be bottomless, led from the plateau, and upon this, in the dim twilight, Armstrong suddenly perceived the figure of a boy, making his way in the direction of the open space.

The villain's heart gave a sudden bound.

The advancing form he saw was no other than Dick Hazel.

He carried a large coil of some tough vine over his shoulder, and appeared to be unarmed.

As yet he had not seen Armstrong's party, nor did he observe them until he had arrived within a few feet of them.

Armstrong's countenance glowed with a devilish, inhuman expression.

Suddenly Dick looked up.

He started, as if he had been shot, at seeing his foe, whom he thought had been drowned in the rapids.

"You alive?" he gasped.

"Yes, and very much alive, as you will find out before I am through with you," was Armstrong's reply, in as cool a tone as he could command. "Seize him, Jobo!"

Before Dick could fairly divine their intentions, Jobo and the black were upon him and he was thrown to the ground.

"At last!" exclaimed Armstrong, as he ground his teeth; "at last I have found you! Now, Dick Hazel, you are my mortal enemy, and I am going to kill you! Do you hear that? kill you, I say! You have thwarted me in everything since I first knew you; and now my opportunity for vengeance has come. Now tell me where the missionary's daughter is, so I can find her and make her my wife. Tell me where she is, I say!"

Dick answered not, but struggled vainly to free himself from the clutches of the blacks, who held him tightly.

At length, seeing that Dick refused to speak, Armstrong said: "Raise him to his feet, Jobo, so I can have a good chance to knife him!"

He grasped his gleaming knife in his belt as he spoke.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CAPTIVES.

It is now about time that we turned our attention to the captives in the village of the yellow-skins, and see what has been transpiring with them.

A day and a night passed.

Nothing had been done to them, as yet, to give them the least cause for alarm, save the fact that they were still retained as prisoners.

Adele and her mother were confined in a hut by themselves, while the Reverend John L. Dailey, Sailor Jack and Hans, the German, occupied another close at hand.

"Py chiminy!" exclaimed Hans, on the second morning follow-

ing their capture, "I vish me dot we get out of here soon. I wonder me where is Dick und Gris un dot Hiram? Dey vos ought to show up puddy soon und take us away."

"I have great faith in our friends," said the missionary, "and I trust that they will devise some means to effect our release; but what they do will have to be done by strategy, for it would be useless for them to think of trying to take us by force."

"Right you are, dominie," remarked Sailor Jack; "that Dick Hazel are a smart boy, he are, and plucky as well. If anybody kin find a way to git us out of this blasted place, he kin, and don't yer forget it. You kin throw me overboard for shark bait if that lad ain't got a head on him! Why——"

The old tar's remarks were cut short by the sudden entrance of one of the yellow-skinned savages.

He motioned them to rise to their feet.

The three said never a word, but obeyed at once.

The savage then waved his hand for them to follow him, and left the hut.

Straight on to the center of the village their guide led them, and then he motioned them to halt.

A large party of the yellow-skins had collected at this point, and the missionary presently discerned his wife and daughter among them.

Grave thoughts passed through the minds of the captives.

Surely the yellow-skins appeared to be too intelligent-looking to murder them in cold blood.

Yet it seemed, by the preparations that were being made, that something was about to be done that was a little out of common in the village.

Presently a huge pile of resinous wood was set on fire, and as the flames burst upward, it shed forth a brilliant, yellowish light.

Then, for the space of perhaps ten minutes, the most abject silence prevailed, at the expiration of which the savages, with one accord, broke into a wild, weird sort of a chant.

It was a solemn sound, and caused a shivery feeling to pass over the bodies of the captives.

Then a sudden signal was given, the savages sprang to their feet, and our friends saw five animals greatly resembling the common jackass being led toward them.

It looked as if they were going to be sent off on a journey somewhere.

But before they had much time to think on the subject, the missionary and his party were assisted to mount the steeds—if such animals could be called steeds.

Rude side saddles had been provided for Adele and her mother, who were handled very gently.

The hopes of the captives at once arose a little higher. This did not look as though they were going to be killed.

About a score of the yellow-skins accompanied them, all the while keeping up their ceaseless jangle.

The animal Hans bestrode seemed to be in a playful sort of mood, for every now and then he would give a sudden jump, and then break into a sort of dance in good imitation of a highland fling.

These antics distressed Hans considerably, and it was with extreme difficulty that he managed to retain his equilibrium.

"What's the matter, Dutchy?" asked Sailor Jack, grinning, as the poor German let out an audible groan; "is your horse a hard rider?"

"Oh, mine Gott! You bet me dot he is!" and turning to a stalwart yellow-skin who walked at his side, he said, imploringly:

"Oh, py chiminy! mister, von't you please let me walk mit mine feet? Der shackass has gone crazy mit himself."

The savage made no reply, but evidently divined what Hans

said, for taking a thong from his girdle, he at once proceeded to lash the feet of the wailing Dutchman together beneath the animal's belly.

He then nodded his head, as if everything was all right, and hit the animal a smart crack in the ribs.

Becoming insulted at this treatment, the jackass gave an indignant snort, and making a mighty bound, freed itself from the savage, who was leading it.

Away, straight for the mountains, went the animal, Hans waving his hand frantically, and yelling lustily for help.

The yellow-skins seemed appalled for a moment at this, and then they started in pursuit, whipping up the animals rode by the rest of the white party.

Away they went, Hans and his jackass going like the wind, and rapidly leaving them far behind.

In vain did the savages endeavor to catch up with the flying Dutchman; it was useless. The fleeing animal seemed to have the very old boy in him, and increased his speed, if anything.

On went the frightened animal and its burden; and at last, striking the mountain side, the sure-footed beast began picking its way upward, like a veritable mountain goat.

Hans' cries for help began growing fainter every moment, and at last they stopped entirely, as both animal and rider disappeared around a bend of rock.

"Blowed if Hans ain't a veritable 'Flyin' Dutchman' an' a 'Mazzeppa' combined," said Sailor Jack, as the party came to an abrupt halt at the mouth of a narrow pass at the foot of the mountains.

"Truly, our adventures have been remarkable," said the missionary. "What they intend to do with us now the good Lord only knows."

But the reverend gentleman was not kept long in waiting to find out their fate, for, mounted as they were, the captives were at once started, single file, through the mouth of the pass, which was nothing more than a deep cleft in the mountain side.

When the last of the four whites had passed through, a huge boulder, weighing many tons, was rolled down a sharp descent across the mouth of the pass, effectually blocking it up.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TABLES ARE TURNED.

For fully half a minute after Hiram Boff disappeared Dick and Chris remained speechless.

So suddenly had the thing happened that they could scarcely realize it.

Striking a match, Dick held it out before him.

They were on the very brink of a yawning chasm.

"My God!" exclaimed our hero; "this is awful; poor Hiram has met with a terrible death upon the jagged rocks below."

Chris said nothing, but shuddered and shook his head, sadly.

But the sounds of the approaching pursuers now brought them to their senses.

During the brief moment in which the light from the match had lasted, Dick had noticed a narrow fissure in the rocky mountain side.

To keep on straight ahead meant to follow the ill-fated Yankee into the depths of the yawning chasm.

A sudden thought flashed through Dick's mind.

Taking off his cap, he laid it on the ground, near the edge of the precipice. Then catching Chris by the arm, he pulled him into the fissure.

They made their way for perhaps a dozen feet, when the opening narrowed down to such an extent that they found it utterly impossible to go any farther.

They had gone the length of their rope, and if the yellow-skins discovered them now all would be up with them.

With wildly beating hearts the two boys listened.

At length they heard their pursuers in close proximity to them.

Soon they saw the light made from the advancing torches.

Two minutes more and the entire band had arrived at the brink of the chasm.

One of the yellow-skins observed Dick's cap lying upon the ground, and stooping, he picked it up.

At this all hands began conversing in a tone of excitement, during which many times our two young friends saw them point downward over the edge of the precipice.

Dick's ruse had worked well thus far, for beyond a doubt, the savages took it for granted that the three whites they had been pursuing had fallen headlong into the abyss.

When they had once come to this conclusion none of them thought to look into the fissure, close at hand, where Dick and Chris were concealed.

Luck seemed to be on the boys' side after all, for the savages soon began to leave the spot and started down the mountain side.

A few minutes after the last one had disappeared the two boys crept forth from the fissure.

One of the yellow-skins had dropped a torch, which still lay flickering upon the ground.

Dick picked this up, and at once discovered his hat a few feet distant, where the savage had thrown it.

He at once donned it, and then said:

"The best thing we can do now is to find a secure place to pass the night in, and when morning comes, try and find a means to get to the spot where Hiram fell, and bury his remains."

"Right you are," replied Chris; "poor Hiram must have met with a horrible death."

It did not take the two boys long to find a small, dry cave, and, crawling into this, it was not long ere tired nature succumbed, and they were soon wrapped in the arms of Morpheus.

Their sleep was a dreamless one; and when they awoke in the morning the sun was high in the heavens.

Crawling from their natural sleeping apartment, the boys glanced down in the valley beneath them.

They could not see the village of the yellow-skins, for it was effectually hidden by a narrow belt of timber.

Both Dick and Chris were hungry, and they at once began to look about for something to eat.

It was an hour or two before they met with any success, when at last, at the bottom of a deep ravine, they came across a solitary stag with immense antlers.

Raising their rifles, both Dick and Chris fired simultaneously.

The stag gave a mighty spring and fell dead, a bullet in its heart and one in its brain.

Now they had plenty of meat.

Selecting a suitable spot, a fire was kindled, and a couple of steaks from the stag were soon sizzling over it.

"Now," said Dick, when they had satisfied their hunger, "let's see if we can find out what became of the poor Yankee!"

Chris assented, and they made their way back to the spot where Hiram Boff had disappeared over the precipice.

Lying on his stomach, Dick peered over the brink.

The abyss appeared to be a thousand feet deep, with numerous rocky ledges and stunted, gnarled trees jutting out from its perpendicular sides.

It was nothing more than a deep gorge, and was about forty feet in width at that point.

As Dick glanced over from the top, he suddenly observed a

piece of clothing of some kind fast to the branches of a small, twisted tree, which threw out its branches about thirty feet below.

Beneath the tree, about fifteen feet, was quite a wide ledge of rock.

The piece of clothing, no doubt, had come from Hiram as he fell, striking the tree in his downward descent.

But if the tree had torn a piece of clothing from the Yankee's falling body, it must certainly have checked his descent somewhat; and if this had been the case, he would have been just as apt to fall upon the ledge beneath as to go on down to the jagged rocks at the bottom of the gorge.

Thus argued Dick to himself as he arose to his feet.

Before he could put his thoughts into words, Chris advanced the same idea.

"Can't we find some means of getting down there?" asked Dick; "but suppose we shout first and see if we can get any reply?"

"A good idea," said Chris; and, leaning over the brink, they both let out a lusty shout, calling the Yankee by name.

They had not thought to do this before, as they had taken it for granted that Hiram had been dashed to pieces below.

But now, even as they shouted, they felt that their cry would be answered, and almost before the last echo of their voices had died away, they found it was indeed so.

Faint, but sure, they heard an answering shout, which they were satisfied came from Hiram.

The boys' hearts gave a bound.

"Can you show yourself?" shouted Dick.

"Yes," was the faint reply, "an' I'm durned glad to be able to do it, I kin tell yer!"

The next moment they saw the form of the Yankee upon the ledge, below the tree.

He presented a sorry-looking appearance, but seemed to be none the worse otherwise.

Seeing the faces of his two friends peering down at him, the Yankee gave a joyful shout.

"Are you much hurt?" asked Dick.

"Nothin' more'n a ternal headache, I reckon," was the reply. "It was daylight this mornin' afore I came to from the effects of my fall. I guess I'll be all right ag'in if you kin git me up thar by you."

"We will do that as soon as possible," said Chris. "How far is it down there?"

"About forty feet, I reckon."

"Well, just try and have patience until we can find some sort of a tough vine that can be used for a rope, and we'll have you up here in a jiffy."

To find a vine suitable for the purpose they intended it for was more of a job than either Dick or Chris had anticipated.

It was some time past noon when they at last discovered what they wanted, and then they started to return to the brink of the chasm.

In about an hour they arrived at the spot.

Hiram Boff sat upon the ledge, anxiously awaiting them.

Dick began lowering the vine down.

It was heavy, and began swinging back and forth like a pendulum.

Suddenly it slipped from our hero's hands and went whirling to the bottom of the gorge, twisting about like a mammoth serpent as it fell through space.

Dick felt sheepish enough at the accident, but it could not be helped.

"That's rough!" exclaimed Hiram; "you'll hev to go down an'

git it, or else git another one. But for gracious sakes, chuck me down somethin' to eat afore you go. I am about starved out."

"You go and get another vine, Dick," said Chris; "and while you are gone I'll cook some of the stag's meat and throw it down to Hiram. Hurry up, for it's tough on the poor fellow to remain where he is so long."

"All right!" said Dick, glad to do something to make amends for what he considered his carelessness in letting the vine drop.

It was sunset when he procured another vine, and he started to return as swiftly as possible.

The shades of night were fast falling, and he was hurrying as fast as he could, with the vine wound up in a coil and slung over his shoulder.

Suddenly, as he made his way along a narrow ledge, he ran, as the reader knows, plump into the midst of Armstrong's party.

The sudden attack had proved too much for him, and he could scarcely realize what had happened.

Even as Armstrong raised his gleaming knife to strike our hero's death-blow, the rapid cracking of a revolver was heard in their very midst, and the next instant a long-eared animal, with a man upon its back, dashed pell-mell among them, knocking Armstrong in a confused heap to the ground, and sending his knife flying from his grasp.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BLACK GORGE.

The Reverend John L. Dailey's heart sank within him as the huge boulder closed up the mouth of the narrow pass.

"My God!" gasped his wife, sinking upon the neck of her strange steed; "why have they driven us in this bleak-looking, narrow place? It looks like death itself here!"

Well might she utter the words. The frowning, rocky sides of the gorge towered high above their heads in a somber appearance of gray and black, while no signs of vegetation were to be seen.

"It looks as though the yellow-skins desired us to go on our way through this gorge," said the missionary. "Perhaps this may result in our deliverance from the continued perils that have surrounded us. Let us go on at once, and see where this pass leads to."

"Ay! ay! dominie," exclaimed Sailor Jack; "this 'ere pass hev got ter fetch up somewhar, thet's sure. I'll be hit with a marlin-spike, if I likes ther looks of the place, though."

He started his animal ahead as he spoke, followed by the ill-fated family.

The pretty face of Adele Dailey had lost some of its plumpness since the time we first met her, and she presented a careworn look. The long strain of the series of exciting adventures she had passed through told plainly on her. Still, she showed more spirit than her mother, who was of a more excitable nature.

With a hopeful feeling in their breasts the party of four struck out.

It was impossible for them to go back, so their only hope lay in getting through the gorge, and thence to some place of safety.

The gorge ran in a sort of zig-zag way, and it appeared as if nature had caused the earth to open during some convulsion, and had forgotten to shut it up again.

In some places it was so narrow that it was impossible to travel two abreast.

A strange, awful stillness prevailed, and everything appeared gloomy and foreboding.

Bravely on went the little party of adventurers.

At last, when at least four or five hours must certainly have

elapsed, they halted, sad and weary, to rest themselves and their animals.

It was now somewhat past the hour of noon, and all hands began to show signs of suffering from thirst.

Dailey called a halt, and they at once dismounted and sank down upon the hard, dry sand.

The missionary prayed for a speedy deliverance, while his wife and daughter wept.

As the Reverend John L. Dailey prayed it seemed to put strength and vigor in his mind and body, and he arose to his feet with the words:

"Now let us proceed on our journey, and trust in God that we will come out all right."

With a more hopeful feeling in their breasts, the party again mounted their long-eared steeds, and set out through the black gorge.

On they kept, until the shades of night began to make their appearance.

The pangs of hunger and thirst soon became alarmingly unpleasant.

But their only salvation lay in getting out of the narrow gorge, where they might find water to quench their thirst and food to stay their hunger.

On they kept for a mile or two more, the animals they rode now beginning to show decided signs of fatigue.

At last Mrs. Dailey declared she could go no farther.

Sailor Jack, who was in the lead, called a halt.

Despair itself now seemed to seize upon the four; but, devout man that he was, Dailey kept on praying for deliverance.

It seemed as if his prayers were in vain.

A drowsy feeling soon became apparent upon the four wanderers.

They sank down upon the dry sand; the jackasses moved off a short distance and did the same.

Presently a faint, undulating, whirring sound broke the awful stillness of the black-looking gorge.

The little band of four listened with a sort of dreamy feeling.

In their disordered state, the strange, unearthly sound had a sort of soothing effect.

One by one they dropped off in a deep sleep.

The long-eared beasts of burden soon followed suit.

Then the faint, whirring sounds began to increase in volume.

Nearer and nearer came the sounds, the flapping noise making a kind of lullaby for the sleeping ones to dream on their sweet dreams of home and peaceful surroundings once more.

What birds can be flying about the narrow confines of the gorge under cover of the inky darkness of night?

Presently one of the mysterious denizens of the air settled down upon one of the sleeping beasts of burden.

Horror upon horrors! It was a vampire bat!

Another and still another settled upon the sleeping forms of the animals; then down came one upon the breast of Sailor Jack.

Soon fully a score of the horrible, blood-sucking demons had settled upon the forms of our unfortunate party.

And still they slept on in blissful ignorance of their danger.

If something did not occur to awaken them very soon, that sleep would surely be their last.

The vampire bats moved their wings with a gentle, soothing sound, and kept on at their fiendish work.

CHAPTER XX.

HANS PROVES HIMSELF A HERO.

Dick Hazel sprang to his feet with a bound as soon as he found himself free, and drawing his revolver, directed its muzzle at Bob Armstrong's breast.

"Now, Armstrong," said he, in a cool tone, "if you move so much as an inch I will let daylight through your villainous carcass!"

At the same instant the clattering of hoofs was heard, and back dashed the strange steed, with its rider, upon the scene.

Two of the blacks had already fallen at the hand of the strange arrival; and now, as the rest of them attempted to arise to their feet and sneak away in the darkness, the revolver began to speak again, and two or three more bit the dust.

"It vas petter dot you stay where you vas—all of you—or by chiminy! I vill kill you deadt!"

As these words rang out Dick's heart gave a bound. It was no other than Hans Strauss who bestrode the long-eared steed.

"Hans—Hans!" he shouted; "by gracious, old fellow, but you're a brick, and no mistake! Dismount, and let's make the rest of these fellows prisoners."

They had but little trouble in doing this. Jobo lay unconscious upon the ground, where he had been knocked by the hoofs of the jackass. Armstrong was covered by Dick's revolver, and the remainder of the party were either dead or wounded upon the ground.

That had been a great charge the German had made with his flying steed, and the shots from his revolver, which had been fired at random, had proved most effective.

It had now grown quite dark, and Hans turned his attention to his steed, after assisting Dick to bind Armstrong and Jobo hand and foot.

A strange spell seemed to have seized upon Hans. Tying his steed to a stunted tree, he began throwing the bodies of the blacks over the cliff.

His sudden advent as a hero seemed to have changed his whole nature.

Instead of being the coward that he had always been known to be, he now apparently possessed the pluck of an ancient gladiator.

"Now, Hans," said Dick, when that individual had finished his work, "you build a fire and stay here and watch the prisoners while I go and get Chris and Hiram. I will be back in half an hour at least, and then we can all hands explain matters a bit. I must go now, as Hiram very much needs my assistance."

"All righd, Dick," replied Hans. "But hurry you up, und come pack righd away."

Seizing his coil of vine, Dick made his way as rapidly as the increasing darkness would permit to the spot where he had left Chris.

He had the good luck to arrive there without mishap, and both Chris and Hiram were very glad of his arrival.

They were very careful this time in lowering the vine, and five minutes after Dick's arrival, Hiram Boff was standing alongside of them.

"It was a lucky escape," said Dick; "but come with me at once—I left a couple of prisoners in charge of Hans back here a ways."

"What!" ejaculated Chris and Hiram in a breath.

"That's just as true as fate," repeated Dick. "I left a couple of prisoners back here a bit in charge of Hans Strauss."

"Who are the prisoners?" asked Chris in a half-doubting tone.

"Bob Armstrong and that rascally black guide called Jobo."

"They alive!" exclaimed Hiram; "why, I thought the dratted

skunks got drowned in ther rapids. And ther Dutchman, too, whar in thunder did he come from?"

"I didn't take time to learn much about it. I wanted to hurry back and get you up from your position on the ledge. But you will soon learn all about it now."

Then, as they hurried along the mountain side, Dick related what had befallen him on his return with the vine to rescue Hiram.

To say that Chris and Hiram were surprised, would be putting it mildly. They could scarcely believe it.

But whatever doubts they might have had were quickly dispelled, for a few minutes later they came in sight of a fire, and the next moment they caught sight of Hans and his jackass, and the two prisoners lying upon the ground.

"Vell, py chiminy gracious!" exclaimed Hans, as he saw them coming; "you don't could pelieve how glad I vos to see you all! Now, if ve could find us out vere dot minister mit his wife und girl und Sailor Chack is, we vould pe satisfied mit ourselves gometely."

Hiram lost no time in quenching his thirst from the neighboring trickling stream, and then proceeded to prepare a meal, while Hans, in his queer way, related what had taken place since his party had first been captured by the yellow-skins.

"You say all hands were coming straight for the mountains when your animal broke loose from the party and ran away?" asked our hero.

"Yes, und ven my jackass git himself tired und stop, I cut mine legs free mit mine knife, und den I tie him und hid mineself till de night gome. Den I git me on his pack und go out mit mineself to find you. By chiminy! I did find you, und shust in time, too, py gracious! A moment more und you vos deadt already."

"Right you are, Hans," said Dick. "But where do you suppose the rest of the party are?"

"Somevere py de mountain, dot vas sure. De yellow-skins no kill dem, or else dey do dot in deir place. No; dey is py the mountains somevere, dot is sure as I knows all about it."

Questioning Hans amounted next to nothing, so Dick at once ceased and turned his attention to the meal Hiram Boff had prepared from the meat belonging to Armstrong's party.

When they had finished, some food was offered to the captives. But Armstrong refused to eat, and remained in silence.

Jobo was more sociable, and bolted the broiled ground-hog into his capacious mouth with great gusto.

Soon large drops of rain began to fall.

It behooved the young explorers to find the shelter of a cave somewhere, unless they desired to be drenched to the skin.

CHAPTER XXI.

INTO THE BOWELS OF THE MOUNTAIN.

The storm had come up very quickly, and the rain soon began to fall in torrents.

A roomy cave was found close at hand, and into this the young explorers went, taking their two prisoners with them.

"What are you going to do with me, Hazel?" asked Armstrong, as he was deposited on the floor of the cave. "Are you going to keep me a prisoner for good?"

"That's the only thing we can do, I guess," said Dick; "you are too treacherous to let go free. I think we had better keep you tied up for the present."

"It vas better dot ve kill him," said Hans, "den he vill be no harm mit nopody."

The light of the fire played upon the features of Armstrong,

bringing them out in bold relief. As Hans uttered the words such a devilish, malignant scowl came over his face that Dick almost started.

He did not think that Armstrong's nature was so vile. Yet he had proved that he would hesitate at nothing to gain his purpose.

"You said you had sworn to kill me," Dick said, looking the villain full in the face; "would you do it, when you got the chance, if I should let you go free?"

For a moment Armstrong remained silent. Then raising his head, he said:

"Dick Hazel, I hate you, and you know it. Let me go free, and I promise you that I will never molest you again, unless——"

He hesitated a moment.

"Unless what?" asked Dick.

"Unless I should happen to come across you unawares an' the devil put it in my head to kill you."

"Armstrong, you are what I call an honest scoundrel," replied our hero; "but it makes no difference. If you had promised by all that was good and bad to leave me alone hereafter, I shouldn't have believed you. And you have the nerve to lie there and tell me to my face that you would kill me at the first opportunity you got to do so. I believe you, Armstrong—I believe you; but I don't mean that you shall ever have the chance again. I intend to keep you a close prisoner until we arrive at some civilized place, and then hand you over to the authorities. If such a thing should happen that we should never get out of this wild, savage country, you will die with us as our prisoner. Remember that, will you, and think over it, and see if you don't think I am about right."

"I didn't say I would kill you at the first opportunity," blurted the wretch.

"Yes, you did; you said if the devil got into you, you would do it. And, I guess, if the devil ever got into any one, he is into you at all times."

"Quite right," put in Chris. "For my part, I think you have been too lenient with him, anyway. I think we would be justified in ridding the world of such a scoundrel as he; your life is in jeopardy as long as he is about."

"Them's my sentiments exactly," exclaimed the Yankee. "Why, I'll be blamed if that feller are fit ter live outside the walls of a State prison; an' as there ain't any State prison here in this part of Afriky, I suppose we'll hev ter kill him an' ther infernal black cuss, too."

Armstrong's countenance paled at these words.

"Don't kill me, Dick! Anything but that!" he implored.

Dick said nothing, but walking further into the cave, he sat down.

The rain still fell in torrents, and soon the fire was put out entirely.

Dick, Chris and the Yankee took turns at keeping watch during the night, and when morning dawned they were prepared to go in search of the missionary and his party.

The storm had ceased some time during the night, and the sun arose like a great ball of fire in the east.

While breakfast was being prepared, Hans, who was prowling about in the back part of the cave suddenly cried out:

"Vell, by chiminy! of here ain't some steps dot go down der mountain in."

As the German's words rang out all hands immediately rushed to his side.

There, sure enough, was a passage leading downward from the furthestmost recess of the cave.

Natural, rough, broken steps showed themselves as far as the eye could see.

Dick's curiosity was at once aroused.

"By gracious, fellows!" he exclaimed, "let's go down a ways and see where this passage leads to. What do you say?"

"I am willing," observed Chris.

"So be I," said Hiram Boff.

"Vell, by chiminy! I goes, too, den," exclaimed Hans.

"What will we do with our prisoners?" asked Dick.

"Take them along," suggested Chris.

"Yes," put in the Yankee, "untie their legs an' take 'em along with us; an' if we kin find a good hole down there, we'll bury 'em in it."

When the young explorers once got a thing in their heads, they always, if possible, put it in execution at once.

This case was no exception.

Ten minutes after Hans had first discovered the passage, they were making their way down the natural steps, lighting the strange place with torches made from some resinous wood that grew on the mountain side.

The steps—if they could be called such—did not proceed over forty yards when they came to a level passage. This ran along for a good distance, and then came a steep decline.

It was difficult work to keep their footing while descending this, for a single misstep would send them rolling to the end of the decline, and they had not the least idea where this would fetch up.

Armstrong began to grumble. It was hard work for him to keep upon his feet, as his arms were tied securely behind his back.

"Why didn't you leave us up in the cave, Hazel?" he asked, pettishly.

"You shut up!" roared Hiram Boff, not giving Dick a chance to make a reply.

Jobo was sullen and morose, and kept on in silence.

On they went for probably ten minutes, and then they noticed a faint light could be seen far down beneath them in the passage.

"I guess me dot ve come out somever," said Hans. Py chiminy! I——"

His words were suddenly cut short, for at that moment his foot slipped upon a stone, and the next instant he went rolling heels over head down the passage.

CHAPTER XXII.

OUT OF THE BLACK GORGE.

Whirr—whirr! went the wings of the horrible vampire bats, and the sleepers slept on, the strange, soothing sound causing them to have the most beautiful dreams.

Five minutes passed.

Some of the horrible creatures had at last obtained a hold and began their terrible work.

But that fair young girl and her companions were not destined to die in that horrible manner.

Soon large drops of rain began to fall.

Suddenly Sailor Jack awoke.

"Blast me, if it ain't a-rainin'," he muttered. "Holy smoke! what blasted things is this a-foul of my hull? Scat! sho! get off, I say!"

Then the old tar let out a yell which caused his companions to spring to their feet with a bound.

"Knock them off!" he exclaimed; "they be big rats with wings on 'em, a-suckin' your blood! Knock 'em off, I say!"

Uttering a cry of horror, all hands at once began beating the vampire bats from their bodies.

This was soon accomplished, though the hideous creatures clung like veritable leeches.

The poor jackasses were then also relieved of their terrible tormentors, and a fire was kindled beneath an overhanging ledge of rock.

The beasts of burden were drawn up close to this, and then all hands prepared to await the first signs of the coming day.

Sleep absolutely refused to visit their eyes now, so there they sat in the drenching rain, in a nearly half-starved condition.

The storm was now at its height, and the rain fell in bucketfuls. Soon the center of the gorge was a flowing stream of water.

At the first appearance of this, all hands proceeded to quench their burning thirst.

The water was muddy, but never before had a drink tasted so sweet to them as did that one in the lonesome confines of the horrible black gorge.

The Reverend John L. Dailey offered a prayer of thankfulness and said:

"We are now saved, for a time at least, since the rain has so kindly come to our relief. In the morning I hope to find a way out of here."

About half an hour before dawn the storm abated, and the rain ceased falling.

The air was chilly, and all hands got up and walked about a little to warm up their blood and cause it to circulate more freely.

The sun was well up before it had grown any way light in the gorge, and, when they could begin to see what they were about, the party of adventurers mounted their animals and started on their way again.

They had not proceeded over two hundred yards when they came to an opening in the side of the gorge.

They started to examine the mouth of the newly-found passage, when suddenly they detected the sound of footsteps coming from it.

The four glanced at each other in surprise, not knowing whether to be alarmed or to rejoice.

Nearer and nearer came the sounds.

"We'll stay here, anyway," said Sailor Jack, in a dogged tone, "an' see who it is—whether it be friend or foe."

He had hardly got the words from his mouth, when a figure emerged from the mouth of the passage, and exclaimed:

"Vell, py chiminy! I beat der rest down; but where haf I gone mit mineself, anyhow? Oh, mine gracious! Who hafe ve here? De minister und all hands! Hurry up, Dick Hazel! I hafe found me der ones ve vos lookin' mit. Come down right away—quick!"

For several seconds after these words rang out, neither of the four could utter a word.

They had found relief, as sure as fate!

"The good Lord be praised!" exclaimed the Reverend John L. Dailey, when he had found his tongue.

"Hello, Dutchy!" said Sailor Jack; "you put me in mind of an angel without wings. Blowed if you don't! Where are the rest?"

"Dey come right away mit demselves. Oh, py chiminy, Sailor Chack! I vos glad to see you und de rest alive!"

A couple of minutes more, and the footsteps could be heard descending the passage.

The next moment Dick Hazel rushed out, followed by the rest of the party.

The meeting was a joyful one with all hands, save, perhaps, with Armstrong and Jobo, who scowled fiercely at the happiness shown by the others.

Adele Dailey's face lit up with a heavenly glow as she beheld

our hero, and it was with difficulty that she restrained herself from throwing herself into his arms.

But, as the found ones were in a hungry condition, all hands at once started up the passage.

The jackasses were sure-footed animals, and made the ascent easily, being led by the male members of the now reunited party.

When they arrived at the spot where Hans tumbled heels over head for several feet, it was difficult climbing.

But they at last succeeded in getting to the cave, and thence into the open air once more.

The hungry ones were at once fed, and then explanations followed all around.

All hands were just congratulating each other on their luck, when a distant shout was heard.

Glancing down the mountain side, they beheld a band of the yellow-skins ascending it as fast as they possibly could.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CHASED OVER THE MOUNTAINS.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Dick Hazel; "we are no sooner out of one difficulty than another comes up before us. Let us make up our minds that we will not be taken by the yellow-skins, and die fighting, if needs be!"

"We will—we will!" chorused all hands.

How the yellow-skins had seen them they knew not, but it was plain that they were discovered, and that meant fight, flight or capture, or perhaps all three.

"I think we had better proceed on our way over these mountains," suggested the Reverend John L. Dailey; "we may be able to outdistance our pursuers, and there is no knowing but what we may be able to reach the limits of civilization all the sooner if we can manage to cross them with safety."

"A good idea," said Dick; "let us start at once."

The jackasses, who were tethered hard by, munching some of the mountain grass, were at once procured.

The two prisoners were then each lashed on a steed; Adele and her mother took up two more, and Hans, the redoubtable horseman, who had served our hero such a good turn, with the aid of his fiery charger, mounted the fifth one.

Hiram Boff and the missionary took charge of the animals bestrode by the two prisoners, and the party then started, as fast as the nature of the ground would permit, up the mountain side in an oblique direction.

At last they struck what seemed to be a sort of natural roadway, and they began to make fair progress.

As the party rounded a bend, they came in plain view of the pursuing savages, who uttered a shout, and set out with renewed speed after them.

It was hot work, being chased up the side of a mountain in the broiling sun, and the fugitives were soon panting from their exertions.

"I say, Dick," suddenly called out Bob Armstrong, "let me turn back; I'd rather chance it with the yellow-skins than to escape with you and be locked up when we arrive at some town. Let me go, will you?"

"Don't you do it, Dick!" exclaimed the Yankee. "Let's stick to our prisoners as long as we kin."

"Right you are!" exclaimed Chris.

"Never fear," said our hero. "I have sworn, if he and I both live, to lodge him safe in some lockup, and I am going to do it!"

"All right," replied Armstrong, in a venomous tone; "I hope the savages will catch us and kill us all."

"Me, too," grunted Jobo, speaking for the first time in a long while.

Glancing behind him, Dick now saw that the yellow-skins were gaining upon them.

As they passed through a narrow defile, he determined to halt, and endeavor to repulse them for a time.

Sending the females and the prisoners on ahead, in charge of the missionary, the others halted, and, holding their rifles in readiness, awaited the coming of the yellow-skins.

At last they plunged into the narrow defile, making a regular mass of moving men in their endeavor to get through after the ones they were in pursuit of.

"Now," said Dick, "give it to them! Remember that they would kill us if they could get us! Now!"

Crack! crack! c-r-a-c-k! crack! crack!

The Winchester repeaters poured out a veritable hailstorm of lead.

Every shot took effect, so close were they to the struggling mass of yellow-skins, and they dropped right and left, like corn before the sickle.

Seeing their men fall in such numbers must have unnerved the yellow-skins, for, uttering a yell of dismay, they began to retreat from the pass.

The young explorers kept up their firing until the last one was out of sight, and then they again set out, following after those who had gone on ahead.

On, on they kept, scarcely halting until nightfall. The yellow-skins had renewed the pursuit after their repulse, but were now gradually falling off.

They had chased the whites from the limits of their domain, and were evidently satisfied.

As the sun sank below the horizon, the last one turned his back upon the young explorers and started on the back track.

As darkness closed in, Dick called a halt, and they went into camp for the night.

There was nothing to be had to eat, so they were forced to make the best of it until morning.

The night at last passed away, and soon all hands were ready to resume their journey.

As luck would have it, Dick managed to shoot a goat, which made an excellent breakfast for the party.

This greatly refreshed them, and they set out with renewed vigor.

About noon they came to a point of the mountain overlooking the side opposite to the yellow-skins' valley.

They had circled upward and around until they had half encircled the mountain peak.

Now all they had to do was to descend to the country beneath them, which did not look over-inviting, to say the least.

At the foot of the mountain range on this side was a narrow strip of forest, beyond which was what appeared to be, as far as the eye could reach, a trackless waste of sandy desert.

It seemed the best thing to go on, though, so they started downward.

To go back meant certain capture by the yellow-skins, while to go on meant they knew not what.

Anyway, they thought they were acting for the best, so they kept on.

It was about as difficult descending as it was ascending the mountain, although much faster progress was made in going down.

When the sun set that night, they were about halfway down, and it was with a feeling of some relief that they lay down to sleep after their evening meal at the side of a purling rill.

Dick lay down between the two prisoners, as it was always the custom of one of the party to do, to prevent any possible escape by gnawing each other's bonds free.

It was Dick's turn to remain off watch altogether that night, and, being tired out, he soon fell in a deep sleep.

Armstrong observed him close at his side, and a restless feeling of devilishness came over him.

Our hero's knife lay on the ground beside him, and the villain thought if his hands were only free how he would like to seize it and plunge it into the sleeping boy's heart.

Armstrong brooded over this for an hour, and at last fell into a fitful sleep.

He tossed about in his uneasy slumber for fully an hour, when suddenly his hand struck a sharp piece of stone, the pain causing him to awake with a start.

With a muttered curse upon his lips, he opened his eyes, and glared wildly about.

The fire had nearly gone out, and it was almost as dark as the grave itself.

Hiram Boff was on guard, his back toward the sleepers.

Beside Armstrong lay the sleeper, and the knife beside him, just as they had appeared before he had fallen asleep.

A thought suddenly struck the wretch, and he at once proceeded to act upon it.

Twisting about, he discovered the sharp stone, which had inflicted the pain on his hand and caused him to awake.

When he had once found it, he silently proceeded to rub the bond which held his hands fast across its jagged edge.

In a little while he had the extreme satisfaction of feeling it part asunder.

He rolled over noiselessly, and found himself free.

A feeling of delirious joy seized upon him, and it was with difficulty that he restrained himself from shouting outright.

But the labored breathing of the sleeper at his side called him to his senses.

Reaching slowly over, he groped about, and at last found Dick's knife.

The sleeper slept on undisturbed, lying with his left side toward Armstrong.

It was not so dark but Armstrong could see the outline of the body, and, raising the knife aloft in his hand, he exclaimed, with a venomous hiss:

"Now, Dick Hazel, die!"

At the same moment he plunged the knife to the hilt in the sleeper's side; and then, springing to his feet, he glided silently away in the darkness, the stamp of a murderer upon his brow.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ELEPHANT-HUNTERS.

Away went Armstrong, the bloody knife still clutched in his hand, his eyes blazing like those of a wild beast in the darkness.

On, on, he dashed, plunging about over the rocky, uneven mountain side, with the word murderer glaring at him in letters of fire.

A strange feeling of satisfaction, intermingled with one of remorse, came over him.

Straight on down the mountain went the villain, with an untiring pace and dare-devil recklessness that was remarkable.

On he kept, until at last, as daylight made its appearance, he had finished the descent and struck the level ground once more.

But he did not seem to tire yet. Straight ahead he went, for about three miles, and then, as the sun arose in all its glory, he

struck the sandy desert that had been seen by the young explorers from the side of the mountain.

Here it was that a most abject feeling of loneliness came over him, and, with a low groan of misery and despair, he sank unconscious in a clump of bushes.

He must have lain thus for an hour or more, when he was brought to his senses by hearing voices close at hand.

With a terrified feeling and a hunted expression upon his face, he arose to his feet, and glanced wildly about him.

Right before him, not a dozen yards away, were four white men, carrying rifles, and dressed in the regulation costume of the African hunter.

They gave a start of surprise, and involuntarily clutched their weapons, as the form of the man arose so suddenly before them.

"Hello, stranger!" exclaimed the foremost man, in a gruff voice. "Where did you come from?"

Armstrong was a quick-witted person, and he at once proceeded to relate and cock-and-bull story of how he had been deserted by the party he was with, and left to starve.

"What might your party be doing in this part of the country, anyway?" asked the man, who was evidently the leader.

"It is an exploring party," answered Armstrong.

"Umph! I thought so—unless they be in the same business we are."

"What business are you in?" Armstrong ventured to question.

"We be elephant-hunters—we kill them for their tusks, you know. Our camp be about ten miles below here. Stranger, if you have been deserted, as you say you have, you are welcome to stay with us until we go back to the Transvaal, which will be in about a couple of weeks, I think."

"Thank you," replied Armstrong, only too glad to accept the offer.

"Where did your party of explorers start from?" suddenly interrogated the man.

"From the Atlantic coast," was the reply.

"What!" exclaimed the man. "From the Atlantic coast, did you say?"

"Yes. Why, how far is that from here?"

"About eight hundred miles, as the crow flies."

"Is that so? I didn't think we had come so far as that."

"No! Nor I don't either, young man. I think your story is a lie from the very beginning."

"Why?" gasped Armstrong.

"Because no white person has ever, nor ever could, cross the mountains and fever swamps that lie between here and the Atlantic. That's why, young man!"

"It's true, though, every word of it," persisted the wretch; and then he proceeded to relate several of the truthful incidents of the journey, taking good care to bring himself in as the mainstay of the party.

"Yes," he went on, "I endeavored to reason with them, as well as I could, but two or three of them are boys younger than myself, and they think they know everything, so, of course, they refused to listen to any plans that I offered. At last, after using me like a dog, they told me to get out altogether. Well, I stayed with them for several days after that, but last night, not being able to stand it any longer, I struck out, as anything was better than living in that manner."

When the lying wretch had finished his story, the leader of the elephant-hunters, who was an Englishman named Rube Wood, shook his head, and said:

"Yours is a strange story, young man, and I must tell you to your face that I am inclined to doubt it a little. But, at any rate, you are welcome to stay with us as long as you behave yourself."

"All right," said Armstrong, with an injured air; "if you don't believe me, why, of course, I can't help it; but I am much obliged to you for your kindness, all the same."

"Well, come on, Mr. What's-Your-Name," exclaimed Rube Wood. "We have been away from camp all night, and met with no success. Let us be getting back."

Armstrong told what his name was, and followed the lead of the four elephant-hunters through the strip of forest at the foot of the mountain range.

Some dried meat was handed to the scoundrel, which he devoured ravenously.

About noon, by keeping close to the mountains, they left the desert far behind, and at length struck the camp.

Another white man, whose yellow beard at once proclaimed him to be a Dutch Boer, and a couple of Zulu natives were in charge of the camp.

A yoke of oxen and an immense covered wagon were close at hand, and the camp possessed a rather neat and tidy appearance.

A smile of satisfaction lit up Armstrong's countenance as he surveyed the comfortable surroundings.

"So far, so good!" he muttered to himself.

CHAPTER XXV.

LOST ON THE DESERT.

Dick Hazel's sleep was not a sound one, as he lay between Armstrong and Jobo. He was restless, and dreamed all sorts of dreams.

At last he awoke with a start.

The camp was in the utmost solitude, and the faint light from the fire, which burned very dim, showed him that everything was the same as it had been when he had fallen asleep.

On his right lay the sleeping form of Bob Armstrong, while Jobo, the guide, occupied a similar position on the left.

Dick's mouth tasted feverish, and, rising up silently, so as not to awaken the rest of the camp, he made his way around a bend of rock to obtain a drink of water from the stream which flowed down the mountain.

The water was cooling, and refreshed him greatly. Seating himself upon a rock, he fell into a reverie.

All sorts of fancies flashed through his mind, and at last he concluded to go and lie down again.

As he came back within the radius of the smoldering camp-fire, a single glance sufficed to show him that one of the prisoners was missing.

He had been gone from the spot barely ten minutes, and for a moment Dick was nonplused at the sudden discovery.

Examination at once showed him that it was Bob Armstrong who was missing. Jobo, who had shifted his position after Dick had got up, lay still and silent, apparently in deep slumber.

Springing forward, Dick endeavored to arouse the treacherous guide, thinking, perhaps, that he was only shamming sleep.

But Jobo was as limp as a dish-rag.

Like a flash, the situation came across our hero's mind.

Jobo was stone dead!

Dick at once summoned Chris and Hiram Boff to his side.

The Yankee produced a torch, and then they plainly saw the body of Jobo, with a ghastly wound in the side, lying upon the ground, while Armstrong was nowhere to be seen.

"My God!" gasped our hero, "it is lucky that I got up as I did. Armstrong must have awoke soon after I left, and, getting his hands free in some manner, struck the fatal blow with my knife, thinking that it was me, instead of Jobo, that he was killing."

"You are about right in your guess, I think," said Chris. "That is the only plausible theory I can arrive at. I wonder where the infernal scoundrel has gone?"

"He'll only starve to death, wherever he has gone, so let him go, and good riddance, I say," remarked Hiram Boff.

"I don't think I will sleep any more to-night," said Dick. "That incident has completely unnerved me."

Chris and Hiram said nothing, but at once proceeded to convey the body of the dead black guide out of sight of the camp, where they buried it.

The rest of the party were not acquainted with what had happened until the next morning, when they, of course, evinced great surprise.

As the party once more started on their journey down the mountain side, Dick acted as an escort to the pretty Adele, and we can truthfully say that in each other's company the way seemed much smoother than it would otherwise have done.

At length, about noon, they at last arrived at the foot of the mountain, pretty well exhausted from the long, tedious descent.

They had traversed much the same course as that taken by Armstrong, and it was with a feeling of great relief that they pitched their camp beneath the shady trees of the African forest.

Game was in plenty, and a spring of cold, clear water trickled close by.

They stayed in this spot until sunset, and then they began to make preparations to move again.

The young explorers were satisfied with their trip thus far.

They felt certain that they had visited parts of the Dark Continent where the foot of white man had never before trod.

"In what direction do you propose to go?" asked the missionary, when they were ready to start.

"I propose to cross the desert we saw from the mountains. I do not think it is more than nine or ten miles in extent, and I am confident that I can see trees and vegetation beyond the sea of rolling sand," replied Dick.

"You are right," said Chris. "Once we cross the desert, we will have no difficulty in striking some place in the land of the living."

"If it is no farther than what you say," observed the Reverend John L. Dailey, "we shall be able to cross it by the light of the moon. According to my reckoning, the planet will rise in about three-quarters of an hour."

"That was just exactly what my idea was," said our hero. "Come, let us cross this strip of woods, and be ready to strike out upon the sea of sand as soon as the moon shows her light."

The jackasses, which seemed to be perfectly contented with their new masters, were mounted by their respective riders, and the rest of the party striking out on foot, the young explorers started to cross the strip of forest which divided the desert from the range of mountains.

In a little while they had threaded the mazes of the woods, and then, as the moon came up, Dick set their course with the compass they yet retained, and they set out to cross the trackless waste.

An hour passed by.

All at once the moon went under, and presently it became as dark as the grave.

Dick promptly called a halt.

"Whew!" whistled Chris; "I guess we are in for it now!"

"What is the matter?" asked Adele Dailey, in a frightened tone, as she caught Dick by the arm.

"I'll tell yer wot's ther matter," said Sailor Jack, in a solemn voice; "we are a-goin' ter have a sand-storm, thet's wot we are. I seed one once before in my life, an' I made up my mind that I

never wanted ter see another one. But I suppose I have got ter. Ah, see! There she comes! Make them blasted jackasses lay down, an' all hands lay down behind 'em. Thet are our only salvation. Now!"

All hands felt that the old tar was right, and they hastened to follow his advice.

After no little difficulty, the animals were forced to lie down. The party then crouched behind them.

They were not a moment too soon, for the next moment the sand-storm was upon them.

With one mighty, surging roar it came, causing the frightened jackasses to scream with terror, and our friends to involuntarily utter a prayer for their safety.

With faces low to the ground, the young explorers waited.

At last the terrible blast was over.

The party arose to their feet, nearly strangled.

"God be praised!" ejaculated the missionary. "That terrible danger is over."

In a little while it was as quiet as before. It still remained dark, however, and a disagreeable feeling that they were in a bad box, began to force itself upon the minds of the party.

Hiram Boff proceeded to rouse up their beasts of burden.

But two arose to their feet.

Examination showed that the other three would never rise again.

They were dead—killed by the terrible blast of sand, which had suffocated them.

A deep sigh came from more than one in the party at this discovery.

Dick struck a match, and searched for the compass, which he always kept fastened to his belt.

It was gone!

His face turned pale, and the flickering match dropped from his hand.

"My God!" he gasped, "we are lost on the desert!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

ARMSTRONG SHOWS HIS TRUE COLORS.

Bob Armstrong was treated very civilly by the elephant-hunters, and before the day passed he became very intimate with the Dutch Boer, who was in charge of the camp when the party returned.

This man, whose name was Joe, was of a sort of sullen disposition, and had been picked up accidentally by the elephant-hunters, and hired as a man-of-all-work.

Thus far he had attended to his duties faithfully, and they had no cause to complain about him.

But it did not take Armstrong long to find out that the man was a person of his own stamp, and before he had been in the camp twelve hours he was scheming to form a plan to rob Rube Wood and his party, and then strike out for the Transvaal, with Joe for a partner.

The Dutch Boer willingly listened to the villain's proposal, and at once agreed with him.

In the meantime, Armstrong was treated to a scare which he never forgot.

On the morning following the advent of his arrival at the camp, Rube Wood invited him to accompany them into the forest to see how they hunted the elephant, of which, he said, there was a herd in the near vicinity.

The rascal would have much rather stayed in camp with Joe, the Dutch Boer, but he dared not refuse, so he at once acquiesced his willingness to accompany the hunters.

Accordingly, Rube Wood and his three companions set out, followed by Armstrong. The camp was again left in charge of Joe and the two Zulus.

After about an hour had passed, they came across certain signs, which indicated that there were elephants about in the near vicinity.

Pretty soon, after a deal of cautious dodging about, this way and that, they observed a herd of eight or ten elephants.

They were not over fifty yards away, and were playfully tearing the vines from a flower-covered bank.

"Now!" whispered Rube Wood.

Simultaneously, the rifles of the four men flew to their shoulders, and, as the reports rang out, they blended into one detonating sound, reminding Armstrong of the discharge of a cannon.

Then ensued a scene which almost baffles description.

One of the huge beasts dropped dead in his tracks; two more staggered blindly about in a circle, and one old bull—the largest of the lot—made a violent rush in the direction of the hunters and their guest, while the remainder of the herd fled in wild dismay in every direction.

"Give it to the bull in his left side, as he passes!" exclaimed Rube Wood, springing into the bushes out of the enraged elephant's path.

With one movement, his companions followed suit, but Armstrong was so unfortunate as to catch his foot in a creeping vine and fall, sprawling, to the ground.

The hunters turned pale at this mishap.

It seemed that they were going to get rid of their guest rather suddenly.

Armstrong was rather slow in scrambling to his feet, and, when he had at last succeeded in doing so, the elephant was upon him.

The wretch gave a shriek of mortal terror, and gave himself up as lost.

Uttering its shrill, trumpeting cries, the huge bull elephant wound his flexible trunk about Armstrong's waist, and, raising him aloft for one brief instant, prepared to dash him into an unrecognizable mass upon the ground.

Bang!

The heavy, smooth-bore rifle of Rube Wood spoke, sending a bullet crashing through the huge beast's heart.

The elephant sank to the ground in a quivering heap, allowing Armstrong to drop uninjured.

Then, apparently unnoticing their guest or the dead bull, the hunters dashed away in pursuit of the other two wounded elephants.

A sickly feeling came over Armstrong, and he lay upon the ground for a few minutes, breathing heavily.

That was about as near death as he had ever been, and the incident had completely unnerved him.

But at length, as he heard the reports of his companions' rifles ring out at some distance off, he arose to his feet, and soon became his old self again.

Giving the carcass of the dead elephant a contemptuous kick, Armstrong strode away in the direction the rifle shots had come from.

In a little while he came upon the hunters, and then, after the tusks of the mighty game had been secured, all hands started back to the camp.

It was long past noon when they arrived there; and the hunters, concluding that they had secured enough ivory for one trip, began making preparations to set out for the Transvaal the next morning.

During the day, Joe, the Dutch Boer, had succeeded in bribing

the Zulus to assist him and Armstrong in their devilish plot; and it now began to look as if they were likely to succeed.

When night came, Joe and one of the Zulus were placed on guard by Rube Wood, and then the rest turned in.

Their morning's work had completely tired the hunters out, and they soon fell into a deep, sound slumber.

In a little while Armstrong softly arose from the blanket which had been given him, and glided slowly away in the gloom, followed a moment later by the remaining Zulu.

Still the elephant-hunters slept on, little dreaming of the peril that menaced them.

It was but the repetition of the old story of the man and the adder.

They had taken Armstrong in and cared for him, and now he was about to sting them in return for their kindness.

Presently the four treacherous villains emerged from the shadows and approached the forms of the sleeping men.

Joe and the Zulus carried heavy clubs, while Armstrong clutched a gleaming knife.

Nearer and nearer they approached, until, at last, at a signal from Joe, the clubs were raised and brought down with sickening force upon the heads of three of the elephant-hunters.

The other uttered a sudden cry, and attempted to rise to his feet, but Armstrong, with a demoniacal expression upon his face, sank his knife to its hilt in his breast.

Uttering a gurgling groan, he sank back upon the ground—dead.

The murderer coolly removed his knife, and then turned his attention to the others.

He was becoming hardened to that kind of work now, and did not appear to mind it in the least.

"Have you finished the others?" he savagely asked, addressing the Dutch Boer.

"I guess so," was the reply; "the clubs are heavy, I can tell you. My! what an excellent butcher you are! You stuck that man better than I could have done it myself."

"That's nothing," returned the villain, coolly wiping off his knife. "Now, let's see how much dust they have got about them."

Brutal and savage as the Zulus were, they looked aghast at Armstrong's coolness.

A search showed that the hunters had about fifty pounds between them about their persons, and this Armstrong at once proceeded to divide equally with his three companions.

Then the oxen were hitched to the wagon, and they started on the back trail, in the direction of the Transvaal, leaving the bodies of the hunters lying where they were.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WOUNDED HUNTER.

"Lost on the desert!" Dick's words rang like a death-knell in the ears of the rest of the party.

It seemed as if fate was against them. After escaping from the continued perils which had surrounded them during their wondering journey from the Atlantic coast, it looked as if they had to meet death after all, and that, too, in a horrible manner, on a burning waste of sand, by starvation.

The inky pall of blackness still hung over the desert, and shut out the stars.

There was nothing for them to do but to await the coming of daylight, and then strike out for some spot beyond the confines of the sea of sand before the sun's rays became so hot as to be unbearable.

Wearily the time passed by, and it seemed to be days, rather than hours, before the first streaks of the coming day showed themselves.

Soon the sun arose like a great ball of fire.

Glancing in a southerly direction, the party thought they surely detected a faint blue line, which, they felt, must certainly be a forest.

Turning their faces toward this, the young explorers started, with a hopeful feeling in their breasts.

As the sun arose higher in the heavens, the heat from its rays became more intense.

An hour's walk on the burning sand, and they saw that the faint blue line they had seen was, indeed, a green forest.

All hands were suffering from a burning thirst.

At length, faint and well-nigh exhausted, they reached the edge of the African woods, and left the sandy waste behind them.

A stream of water was soon found, and, after slaking their thirst, all hands sank down upon the cool, mossy ground, to obtain the rest they were so sorely in need of.

The long strain of hardship and excitement was telling upon the missionary's wife, and she began to show symptoms of a fever.

Chris still had some quinine, which had been found in the boat Armstrong had fitted out to leave the burning ship. Heavy doses of this were given her, but it was plainly evident to all that Mrs. Dailey was not long for this world, unless the services of an experienced doctor were secured very soon.

The effects of the quinine served to stimulate her somewhat, and about noon the party again started on their journey, going straight into the forest.

It was cool and shady beneath the trees, and they experienced no great difficulty in traveling.

Suddenly Hiram Boff, who was a little in advance, stood stock still and uttered a cry of surprise.

All hands rushed to his side.

Before them were the tracks of a wagon!

At this sudden evidence of civilization, the missionary's wife fainted outright.

Her weakened constitution could not stand the sudden joy she felt. But it was only for a short time, however, for she was soon brought to.

"Now," said Dick, in a hopeful tone, "our way seems to be clear. We will follow these wagon tracks until we come across some human being. No doubt, it is a party of hunters, or explorers, who have gone this way. Come, let us go on at once—the tracks are fresh; we will soon be able to overtake them."

"Hold on, strangers; help me a little bit, and perhaps I can help you somewhat in this matter."

All hands jumped as if they were shot.

Coming from the bushes, a few feet away, was the figure of a man, dressed in the garb of an African hunter. He carried no arms whatever, and presented a very bedraggled and forlorn appearance.

"Why, man, you are just as welcome as ther flowers in May!" exclaimed Hiram Boff, rushing to meet the stranger. "Well, I'll swow, if he ain't badly hurt, too! Stranger, has there bin a fight?"

"Well, not exactly," said the man, as he walked toward the party, assisted by the Yankee; "murder and robbery, that's all. I be the only one left of four elephant-hunters, and I only escaped because it was a glancing blow that I got. It gave me a terrible headache, though."

"Do you know who committed the dastardly act?" asked the Reverend John L. Dailey.

"Yes—Joe, a Dutch Boer servant we had, two Zulus and a fellow we picked up a day or two ago."

"What!" ejaculated Dick. "What was his name, did he tell you?"

"I believe he said his name was Armstrong."

"The villain has been at his work again," said Chris, "and, if we catch him, he deserves no mercy."

"We'll catch him, as sure as my name is Rube Wood!" exclaimed the wounded elephant-hunter, who had alone survived the cowardly attack of Armstrong and his murderous companions. "The oxen can't travel very fast, and now that you have come along, I'll stand a little chance to get revenge. I struck out on the trail this morning, as soon as I came to my senses, hardly able to walk, and unarmed. If you will kindly fix up my head a little, I'll feel better, I think. I—I—I—"

The poor man fell to the ground in a faint.

Restoratives, such as could be had, were at once applied, and, after the wounded hunter had come to, his wound was dressed and he began to feel better.

He then told the whole story of how Armstrong had been picked up by his party, and the story he had told them regarding the young explorers.

Of course, Rube Wood evinced much surprise when Dick Hazel told him the true state of affairs, and of Armstrong's repeated treachery and wrongdoings.

"Well," said the elephant-hunter, when our hero had finished his story, "if we hurry up a bit, we will be able to come up with the murdering thieves some time to-morrow, I guess, and then look out for squalls! They've got all that belongs to me, and what did belong to my murdered companions. I tell you, friends, it be bound to make a man desperate to be placed in the situation I am in!"

"Right you are!" remarked Hiram Boff.

"Py chiminy! I dinks me so, too!" put in the redoubtable Hans.

"Well, I guess we all think that way," said Sailor Jack. "But come—hadn't we better be off on the trail of ther blasted pirates?"

"You are right!" exclaimed Dick. "Come, let us start at once."

The two remaining jackasses were ridden by the females, and the rest of the party, which had now grown quite large, striking out on foot, they soon began to progress quite rapidly over the wagon trail.

They kept up the march until nightfall, and then pitched their camp for the night.

Early the next morning they again started out, feeling that they could not be far behind Armstrong and his companions.

About noon they came in sight of the wagon, which had just come to a halt.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE FIGHT.

Armstrong and his three companions in crime had evidently halted for a resting spell, for presently Dick's party observed the two Zulus carrying wood to start a fire.

Weak as he was from the loss of blood, it was with difficulty Rube Wood could be restrained from rushing headlong at the villains. But he was pacified with the assurance that everything would be ready to give them a surprise in a very few moments.

"Now," said Dick, "Mr. Dailey and his wife and daughter will stay here with the animals, while the rest of us surround Armstrong's party, and, when I give the word, rush down upon them and capture them alive, if possible. But, if they offer too strong a resistance, shoot them down, as they deserve."

Meanwhile, Armstrong and Joe, the Dutch Boer, were busily preparing their noonday meal, little suspecting the surprise that was in store for them.

"There is one thing that I am sorry for," said Armstrong, as he watched his companion broiling a pheasant over the fire.

"What's that?" asked Joe.

"Because I didn't try and carry the girl I was telling you about off with me. I tell you, she is a beauty, and no mistake!"

"You mean the missionary's daughter?"

"Yes; and if it hadn't been for that cursed Dick Hazel, I could have done so. But one consolation—I settled his account, and he will never get her!"

"That's so," assented Joe; "but come, let us eat this grub. It smells as though it might be good."

At that moment one of the Zulus uttered a sharp cry, and ran up to the two villains.

But, before he could open his mouth to utter a word, the crack of a rifle was heard, and he tumbled headlong into the fire—stone dead.

Joe sprang to his feet, and seized his rifle, while Armstrong drew his revolver and glared wildly about in dismay.

The next instant a voice came from the bushes, which the villain recognized only too well:

"Bob Armstrong, your race is run! We have got you and your companions covered with our rifles, and you may as well give in, for we are going to take you, dead or alive!"

It was the voice of Chris Larsen that uttered the words.

For a moment Armstrong turned as white as a sheet, and then, giving a yell of defiance, fired his revolver in the direction of the voice.

But Chris had anticipated something of this sort, and had changed his position immediately after he had ceased speaking.

Consequently, the bullet flew wide of its mark.

"I will never give up!" shouted Armstrong. "Shoot me down, if you will, but don't think I am fool enough to surrender!"

Plucking up a little courage, the Dutch Boer fired a shot in the bushes, and then both began to retreat toward the wagon, followed by the remaining Zulu, who seemed to be badly frightened.

"Charge!" exclaimed Dick Hazel, bursting through the bushes, followed by the rest of the party.

Crack! crack! crack! The reports rang out in rapid succession, but Armstrong and Joe managed to reach the wagon without being hit. But the Zulu tumbled to the ground, with a bullet in his back, just as he reached it.

Then for a moment the two villains began to pour out an answering fire, which checked the young explorers in their rush, and told them to be more cautious if they desired to escape without loss of life.

For the next five minutes neither side fired a shot, and then occasionally one would come from either side, neither doing any damage.

Suddenly Armstrong's scheming brain hit upon an idea.

"Come, Joe," said he, "let's sneak out of the front part of the wagon. It is our only chance, for they are bound to get the best of us in the end."

Joe signified his willingness, and the two sprang noiselessly out of the wagon and glided away in the bushes.

Straight along the wagon track they kept, until suddenly they saw the missionary and his family, with the two jackasses.

"Well!" ejaculated Armstrong, "did you ever see such luck?"

Stealthily creeping up, they arrived within a few feet of the unsuspecting ones.

Making a sudden leap, Joe felled the Reverend John L. Dailey to the ground with the butt of his rifle.

So sudden was the onslaught that for a few moments Adele and her mother remained speechless.

As the Dutch Boer seized her in his strong arms and sprang upon the beast's back, her power of speech returned, and she let out one wild cry for help.

Then his hand was placed over her mouth, and the jackass galloped madly away, followed by its mate, which was bestrode by Armstrong.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"LIAR! DICK HAZEL IS HERE!"

Five minutes passed.

As no more shots came from the wagon, Dick's party began to suspect that something was wrong.

They were just on the verge of making a break for it, and run the risk of being shot, when a piercing scream rang out, followed by the sound of fleeing hoofs.

Dick recognized the voice.

It was Adele Dailey, and she was certainly in distress.

Making a sudden bound, Dick darted to the spot where he had left the missionary's family, followed by the rest of the party.

Both the reverend gentleman and his wife lay upon the ground, while Adele was nowhere to be seen.

"My God! What has happened?" exclaimed our hero. "That villain, Armstrong, has got the best of us, after all!"

"See!" said Chris, pointing through an opening in the forest; "there they go, with the two jackasses, and they have got Adele, too!"

For a brief moment Dick reeled like a drunken man, and then his manner suddenly changed.

"Attend to Mr. Dailey and his wife, and then follow me. I am going to rescue her, or die in the attempt!"

Uttering these words, our hero dashed away in pursuit of the flying fugitives, rifle in hand, worked almost into a frenzy.

But he was soon left far behind, and presently the villains disappeared from sight.

A plain trail was left, however, and he kept on, with an untiring gait that was remarkable.

On, on, now running, now walking, but with the same impulse that had first come over him.

Dick knew full well that his companions would follow him, so he kept on the trail, which now began to show signs of being a regular road.

At last the sun sank below the horizon, and Dick was forced to the conclusion that, if he overtook the villains before morning, it would be by chance only.

Just as darkness set in, he came to the bank of a swift-running stream, along which ran the road.

A log was floating down near the shore at that moment, and, prompted by a strange feeling he could not resist, Dick sprang overboard and climbed upon it.

He then began to drift rapidly down the stream.

It was much faster and easier traveling than on foot, and, besides, he was going in the very direction as that taken by Armstrong and the Dutch Boer with their fair captive.

A couple of hours passed by.

Dick still retained his seat upon the log, rifle in hand.

Suddenly he was startled by seeing the light of a fire on the left bank of the stream.

A sudden thought struck him.

What if this was the camp of the ones he was in search of?

He did not think it probable that there were any other human beings about.

Yet, on second thought, he concluded that this was liable to be the case, as the road on the bank of the river showed signs of civilization.

As the fire was on the same side of the river as the road, he thought it would be worth his while to investigate a bit.

Moving his legs, he gradually worked the log in shore, and at last landed, a few hundred yards above the camp-fire—if such it really was.

Proceeding with the utmost caution, he made his way along.

A thousand conflicting emotions passed through his mind.

But a single glance showed him that they were not the ones he was in search of.

Crawling a little nearer, he saw that there were three men seated about the fire—a white man and two blacks.

Close at hand a horse was tethered, all ready to mount.

A glance showed Dick that the horse was a fine one—in fact, he was much more taken up with the appearance of the horse than he was with its master, who was a short, dumpy Hollander, of a vicious, domineering appearance.

He was seated before the fire, eating a piece of half-cooked meat, and the blacks, who were evidently his servants, stood at either side of him, ready to obey his slightest command.

All this Dick took in at one sweeping look, and he was just making up his mind to step forward and question the man in regard to the ones he was in search of, when he was suddenly startled by hearing the sounds of approaching footsteps.

Thinking that it was some one who belonged to the Hollander's party, he concluded to wait until they had arrived before making his inquiry.

But he soon saw that it was no one who belonged to that camp that was coming, for, as soon as he heard the sounds of advancing footsteps, the Hollander sprang to his feet, in evident alarm, and seized his gun.

The next moment the approaching ones burst into view.

Dick's heart gave a bound.

Before him stood Armstrong, Joe, the Dutch Boer, and Adele Dailey.

The girl said never a word, but possessed such a frightened look that our hero's heart melted in pity for her.

So excited did Dick get that it was difficult for him to restrain himself from shooting the two villains in their tracks.

But he made up his mind to wait a minute or two before he proceeded to act.

Suddenly he gave a start.

The two villains and their captive were on foot.

Where were the animals they had ridden?

Before our hero could bring himself to form any conclusion in regard to this matter, Armstrong advanced toward the Hollander and spoke.

"Friend," said he, in a tone of the deepest distress, "can you assist these wayfarers by helping them to get to the nearest settlement?"

"What you do about here on foot?" demanded the Hollander, in a shrill, piping voice.

"We had horses, but mine stumbled and broke its leg, and, while my friend was assisting me, his horse ran away, so we have been making our way on foot for nearly an hour."

Armstrong spoke these words in such a whining voice that Dick was almost tempted to spring from his place of concealment and clutch him by the throat.

The Hollander was evidently suspicious of his visitors, for, clearing his throat, he said:

"What you do with a girl in this wild place? This is no place for such as she. You think you can fool me—something is wrong, I'm sure. How much money have you got to give me if I help you?"

The fat rascal's eyes twinkled as he spoke.

"Oh," went on Armstrong, "now you are talking. The trouble is just this: The young lady here is my friend's sister, and I am going to marry her as soon as we get to a place where we can get the services of a clergyman. I will give you twenty pounds if you will take us to such a place."

As the villain spoke these words, Dick saw Adele's breast heave convulsively, and she made a motion as if to speak, but before she could do so the Dutch Boer had thrust his hand over her mouth.

"I will tell you what I will do," said the Hollander, thinking he had a chance to make a little money, "I'll take you to my place, and keep you for a couple of days, and then fix you out with good horses and start you off for the Transvaal. But you must pay me two hundred pounds for this, or I'll not help you one little bit."

Now, Armstrong did not have as much money as that, but without a moment's hesitation he agreed to the proposal, and paid the man twenty pounds as a sort of retainer.

"How far is it to your place?" he asked.

"About fifteen miles to the south," was the reply.

At this moment Adele made a sudden spring, and broke loose from Joe.

Becoming hysterical, she began to scream.

"Dick—Dick! Dick Hazel!" she cried. "Oh, why do you not come and save me from these villains?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Armstrong, seizing her by the shoulder.

"How useless to call on him for help; he can never help you. Dick Hazel is dead."

"Liar! Dick Hazel is here!"

The words rang out like a clarion note, and our hero, a revolver in either hand, sprang before the astonished villains.

CHAPTER XXX.

AT THE HOLLANDER'S HOUSE.

Chris saw that it was useless to attempt to stay Dick from his determination to follow Armstrong and Joe, and rescue Adele, so he said nothing as the boy dashed away in pursuit.

He, of course, intended to follow as soon as the missionary and his wife were able to do so.

In the meantime, Hiram Boff was endeavoring to restore them to consciousness.

Mrs. Dailey, who had only fainted, soon opened her eyes.

"Where is Adele?" she gasped. "Gone—gone!"

"We will soon have her back; Dick Hazel has gone after her," said Hiram, consolingly.

The Reverend John L. Dailey had received a severe blow on the side of the head, and it was several minutes before he came to himself again, and, when he did so, his brain was in such a muddled state that he scarcely knew what was going on around him.

"Are you strong enough to follow after Dick?" asked Hiram of Mrs. Dailey, when the missionary had got upon his feet.

"Yes," she feebly answered.

"Let us start at once, then," said Chris; "the trail is plain enough."

"Lead on, my hearty!" exclaimed Sailor Jack, "and, if I clap my binnacle lights on that blasted Armstrong, I'll sink his ship on the spot!"

By assisting the missionary and his wife, the party managed to make fair progress along the trail after Dick.

At nightfall, Mrs. Dailey gave out completely, and her husband was not much better off.

Chris called a halt, and the party went into camp.

After a rest of a couple of hours, Chris Larsen and Rube Wood determined to start out on a scouting expedition in search of Dick.

The project was no sooner formed than they started to put it into practice.

Bidding the rest of the party remain in camp where they now were until they returned, they shouldered their rifles, and struck out on their mission.

It was comparatively easy traveling over the trail, which now had the appearance of a country lane in England or America.

It was starlight, and they had little difficulty in keeping upon the right track.

Occasionally Rube Wood struck a match to see if the marks of the jackasses' hoofs could be seen yet, and, becoming satisfied on this point, they would set out again with renewed speed.

The minutes flew by.

Rube Wood again struck a match, and examined the ground.

No hoof prints could be seen.

Our two friends were in a quandary.

They were just considering the advisability of turning back to find out where the trail branched off from the road, when they were startled by hearing the sounds of rapidly-approaching hoofs.

"We will play highwaymen!" said Chris, "and call upon whoever this is to 'stand and deliver!'"

"All right," replied the elephant-hunter; and the two sprang into some bushes at the roadside, and lay in wait.

Nearer came the approaching steed, and presently, as it neared the spot where the two were in waiting, it came down into a walk.

At last it emerged in sight in a patch of starlight.

Chris and Rube Wood beheld a large, fine-looking horse, with a double burden upon its back.

"Halt!" exclaimed Chris, springing from his place of concealment, and raising his rifle to his shoulder.

"Hello, Chris! is that you?" came from some one on the horse's back.

"What!" almost yelled Chris. "Is it Dick Hazel I hear addressing me? Why, old fellow, we were looking for you. What! Adele, too? Well, this is luck!"

It was even so.

As Dick uttered the words, "Liar! Dick Hazel is here!" Armstrong turned as pale as a sheet, and dropped powerless to the ground.

He thought our hero was a visitor from another world.

Not so with the Dutch Boer, though.

Raising his rifle, he sprang forward, and attempted to fell the brave boy to the ground.

But he was not quick enough.

Crack!

Dick Hazel's rifle spoke, and he dropped to the ground, with a bullet in his heart.

With a cry of joy, Adele threw herself in Dick's arms.

At the sudden appearance of our hero, the Hollander and his black servants had started back in petrified astonishment, and before they could recover themselves Dick had severed the rope which the horse was tied with.

Then, quickly assisting Adele upon its back, he sprang on behind her, and dashed away at a breakneck speed.

At this point, the big, fat Hollander recovered from his astonishment somewhat, and, raising his gun to his shoulder, fired at the rapidly disappearing horse and its riders.

But the bullet flew wide of its mark, and away went the noble steed with its double burden at a dead run.

On they went, until at last they met Chris and the elephant-hunter.

Dick dismounted, and, placing Adele in the saddle, the four started for the camp.

At length they arrived there, and the meeting of Adele and her parents was a joyful one.

The next morning Dick suggested that they should proceed on their way to the house of the Hollander, and in some manner make arrangements to procure horses to make their way to the nearest town.

Of course, all hands agreed on this point, and they at once set out.

It took them a day and a half before they came in sight of the place which Dick judged to be that of the Hollander, as houses in that section were few and far between.

The sight of a civilized house almost took the breath away from the young explorers, it had been so long since they had seen any such thing.

There it was, a house, sure enough, with its old-fashioned gables, built in the Dutch style, and it presented a rather comfortable and inviting appearance.

The party quickly observed that it was an ostrich farm they had struck by the number of the huge birds they saw about.

The afternoon was well advanced when they arrived at the gate of the stockade which surrounded the house, and sought admittance.

The head and shoulders of an elfish-looking boy appeared over the top of the gate.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"We want to see the man who owns this place on business," replied Dick.

"All right; you'll have to wait till I go and see if he'll let you in."

And the boy disappeared.

In about a quarter of an hour he returned, and threw open the gate.

"Come on in," he said, "and, if there is a chance for Herr Koppel to make anything from you, he'll do it."

He smiled, knowingly, as the party passed through the gateway and made their way up to the house.

A man stood on the porch.

Dick recognized him at a glance.

It was the Hollander to whom the horse he had taken belonged.

A sudden thought struck him.

Leading the horse up to the porch, he said:

"My friend, here is the horse I borrowed from you the other night. I am much obliged to you, and, if you will tell me how much I owe you, we will pay you."

The man made no reply, but, placing his fingers between his lips, he gave a shrill whistle.

The next instant a dozen men, armed with muskets, appeared on the scene, with the evil face of Bob Armstrong in their midst.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BOB ARMSTRONG RECEIVES HIS REWARD.

For a moment Dick's party were struck dumb with astonishment at the sudden appearance of the men.

Armstrong's face lit up with a devilish smile of satisfaction.

"Now, Dick Hazel," said he, "it appears that I failed to kill you that night on the mountain, but you will not escape this time. The heart of every one in your party is covered with the muzzle of a gun, and the first who moves will die like a dog! That's so, ain't it, Herr Koppel?"

"Yes, that's so," assented the Hollander, in a sort of hesitating way.

He was thinking of the after consequences of this kind of business.

Dick noticed his hesitancy, and he at once spoke up.

"Herr Koppel," said he, in as cool a tone as he could command, "are you not aware that you lay yourself liable by permitting such high-handed work as this on your premises? Think over it; we are peaceful travelers, and desire protection rather than to be murdered and robbed."

"Who says you will be murdered and robbed?" demanded the Hollander, in a piping, trembling tone.

"I don't know what else it means. You are harboring that villain, Armstrong, there, and that is his intention."

Armstrong saw that the young explorers were gaining ground, and, turning almost black in the face with suppressed rage, he yelled out:

"A thousand curses on you all!"

Leveling his revolver at Dick, he pulled the trigger.

Owing to his rage and excitement, his aim was not very good, and the bullet missed our hero, and passed through the elephant-hunter's hat.

Angered beyond control at this, Rube Wood drew a bead with his rifle upon the fiend, and pressed the trigger.

As the report rang out, Armstrong staggered a few steps and fell to the ground.

Herr Koppel's retainers lowered their muskets, and all rushed to the side of the wounded man.

Armstrong was breathing heavily, and the blood flowed in a crimson stream from a wound in his side.

He was in a semi-conscious state, and a sort of peaceful expression was on his evil countenance.

The Hollander and his men hung their heads, and remained in silence.

Seeing that there was no danger of being molested for the present, Dick stepped to Armstrong's side.

Bad and wicked as the young fellow had been, our hero felt sorry for him.

As Dick bent over him, a smile crossed his face.

This was so different from what the boy had expected that he gave a start, in spite of himself.

"Hazel," said Armstrong, "you have got the best of me, after all. But it ain't because I wanted you to. It was to be, I suppose, and I am satisfied. Hazel"—his voice was getting husky—"I am going to that bourne from whence no traveler ever returns; the elephant-hunter fixed me with that shot of his. Maybe I deserve it—and I guess I do—but never mind that; there is something I want to say to you before I die. I ain't afraid to die. Go away! I don't want a minister to talk to me. I have lived without the use of one, and I intend to die in the same manner."

Dick motioned the Reverend John L. Dailey, who had knelt at the dying wretch's side, to go away.

The missionary obeyed, and Armstrong proceeded, in a voice but little above a whisper:

"I tried to kill you, Hazel, on board ship, because I was hired to do it by the captain, who, in turn, had been hired to do the job by your uncle, or his agents. This I learned before I agreed to undertake the job."

"When you got the best of me that day on the yard-arm, I began to hate you for a fact, and from that day to this I have tried to kill you. But it was not to be, Hazel; it was not to be. I believe in fate, and that what is to be will be—that a person's life is mapped out for them the day they are born; and, as this was intended for my fate, why, I am perfectly satisfied."

"When you get back to New York, Hazel, and get what belongs to you, and marry the dominie's daughter, and settle down, if you ever chance to speak of Bob Armstrong then, don't say he was a coward; call him a villain—murderer—or anything else—but don't say he was a coward. A coward couldn't talk like this, with death at his very elbow. Remember this, will you? And now I guess I have said enough. Good-by, all!"

He never spoke again.

When Dick tried to stop the flow of blood, he pushed him away, impatiently.

Half an hour later he died without a groan.

The hard-hearted wretch had gone before his Maker as he had lived.

The Reverend John L. Dailey knelt in prayer for a few minutes; and, when the young explorers again raised their heads, Herr Koppel alone remained on the porch near them.

His retainers had gone off to attend to their duties upon the farm.

"Friends," said the Hollander, with the utmost respect, "I did wrong to treat you in the manner I did. Come in; you are welcome."

He threw open the door as he spoke.

It was with a feeling of peace that all hands filed into the house.

The Hollander's family consisted of his wife, two grown-up daughters and a son—the boy who had let them in at the gate.

The wife was a large-built, frowsy-headed woman, and the daughters were passably good-looking girls.

Hans at once began casting sheep's eyes at the youngest, who returned the glances with interest.

All three of the females seemed to be rather hospitably disposed, and they soon made things comfortable for all hands.

For three days the party remained here, being treated with the most extreme courtesy.

When the time came to leave, Dick found that two of the party had concluded to remain where they were.

He was not over-astonished at this, as he had noticed a thing or two since they had been at Herr Koppel's house.

The two who had concluded to remain on the ostrich farm had been offered good positions by the Hollander, and, besides, they had fallen dead in love with his two buxom daughters.

The two were Hans Strauss, our German friend, and Rube Wood, the elephant-hunter.

Herr Koppel seemed to be a changed man since the young explorers came to his house, and, in order to show them how really good he felt toward them, he proposed that Hans and Rube Wood should be married before they left.

All hands being willing, the missionary tied the knot a couple of hours before they left.

Armstrong's body had been interred the same day he died, so there was nothing left to mar the pleasures of the occasion.

Herr Koppel had supplied Dick's party with first-class horses and all the necessary equipments to reach the nearest English settlement, and it was with a feeling of regret that our friends bid good-by to the house and its occupants.

Before they left, Rube Wood called Dick to one side, and, placing a small bag of gold in his hand, said:

"Here, Dick, is sufficient money for you all to get back to New York—Herr Koppel has advanced it to me for that express purpose. I know that you are not fixed for the purpose; and, if you are ever able to return it to me, I will be glad to receive it; but, if not, it is all the same. Now, good-by, and God bless you!"

With tears in his eyes, Dick accepted the bag of gold, promising to return it as soon as he got things settled up in New York.

Two days later they arrived at the English settlement, and from thence, after a long and tedious journey, they went to Cape Town.

Here Mrs. Dailey was taken violently ill, and it was many days before she was able to set sail in a ship for London.

But at last her health began to gradually come back to her, and then, at her request, her husband concluded to give up his life as a missionary forever.

The day the ship in which they had engaged passage, set sail, Dick felt happier than he had since he had been thrown under the protection of his villainous uncle.

It looked as if all things would be right with him now.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DICK HAZEL'S TRIUMPH.

We now request the reader to jump with us from Southern Africa to John Holton's mansion, in the city of New York.

It is nearly eight months since Holton and Bill Holcombe, his villainous tool, concocted the devilish plot to send Dick Hazel away to sea, never to return.

What changes have been wrought in those few months! Bill Holcombe had been dead these two months—killed by a runaway horse while on a drunken spree; and John Holton himself at the present moment lying at the point of death.

The ill-fated *Becky A. Malvern* had never been heard from, and, with the aid of Holcombe, forged proofs had been furnished showing that Dick had shipped upon her.

But, by a point of law, John Holton soon found that he would be unable to touch a penny of the estate belonging to the boy, save that which had been his regular allowance, until Dick's twenty-first birthday had passed.

Then, if our hero failed to put in an appearance, to claim what belonged to him, it went to his rascally uncle.

The court had decided that the mere fact that the ship had never been heard from was not sufficient proof that the boy was dead, no matter how much it looked that way.

After Bill Holcombe's death, a sort of worriment seized upon the mind of Holton, and he began drifting rapidly into a decline.

Thus we find him on this day, with the angel of death hovering near him.

How different things were from the night he and his accomplice had clinked their glasses together and formed a plot to take the life of an innocent boy.

He would have given worlds to have that undone at the present moment.

But it was too late now—too late!

Since he had been confined to his bed, he had suffered the tortures of the damned, and he now prayed for death to take him from his troubles.

On this particular day he seems to be weaker than usual, though his mind appears to be in a more tranquil state than it has been for many a day.

His wife sits at his bedside, in a grief-stricken attitude.

Presently there is a gentle knock upon the door.

Mrs. Holton arose and opened it.

"What is it?" she demanded of the servant who stood there.

"Please, ma'am, Master Dick has come back, and——"

"What!" almost shrieked the sick man, nearly springing from his bed in his excitement. "Dick Hazel come back! Oh, God! can this be true? If so, I can die in peace!"

He sank back upon his pillow, exhausted.

The next moment our hero entered the room—the same Dick Hazel that had been kidnaped a few short months before, only a little stouter, perhaps, and bronzed by the exposure he had undergone.

A peaceful smile came upon the face of John Holton, and he held out his hand to our hero, who immediately grasped it.

"Forgive me, Dick!" exclaimed the dying man, in a voice but little above a whisper; "forgive—forgive——"

Uttering a gurgling moan, he sank back upon his pillow.

The excitement had been too much for him.

John Holton was dead.

* * * * *

Several years have passed since Dick Hazel and his friends returned from Africa, and many changes have occurred.

Dick is married and settled down, and at the head of a very profitable mercantile business.

Of course the reader can guess who his wife is.

It could be no other than the pretty Adele Dailey, who had shared his many perils and hardships while in the wilds of the Dark Continent.

Dick occupies the handsome residence occupied by his late uncle, and his aunt and his wife's father and mother live with him.

To say that he leads a happy life would be but putting it mildly.

Chris Larsen is now the captain of one of our large merchant-men, and, at last accounts, was still a single man.

Sailor Jack had been lucky enough to marry a widow in well-to-do circumstances, and he now enjoys life as only a retired sea-man can.

The last we heard of Hiram Boff he was settled in his native State—Connecticut—making money at tobacco farming.

The crew of the ill-fated *Becky A. Malvern* were never heard of after leaving the burning ship, and they must have failed in reaching the African coast, or else, if they did so, they must have been killed by the savage blacks.

Our hero frequently hears from Hans and Rube Wood, who are still living in the Transvaal Republic, South Africa. Both are getting along finely, and are raising large, healthy families.

And so this winds up the story of Dick Hazel, Explorer.

THE END.

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